

THE CAMBRIDGE WORLD HISTORY

*

VOLUME IV

From 1200 BCE to 900 CE, the world witnessed the rise of powerful new states and empires, as well as networks of cross-cultural exchange and conquest. Considering the formation and expansion of these large-scale entities, this fourth volume of *The Cambridge World History* series outlines key economic, political, social, cultural, and intellectual developments that occurred across the globe in this period. Leading scholars examine critical transformations in science and technology, economic systems, attitudes toward gender and family, social hierarchies, education, art, and slavery. The second part of the volume focuses on broader processes of change within Western and Central Eurasia, the Mediterranean, South Asia, Africa, East Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Oceania, as well as offering regional studies highlighting specific topics, from trade along the Silk Roads and across the Sahara, to Chaco culture in the US Southwest, to Confucianism and the state in East Asia.

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THE CAMBRIDGE WORLD HISTORY

The Cambridge World History is an authoritative new overview of the dynamic field of world history. It covers the whole of human history, not simply history since the development of written records, in an expanded time frame that represents the latest thinking in world and global history. With over 200 essays, it is the most comprehensive account yet of the human past, and it draws on a broad international pool of leading academics from a wide range of scholarly disciplines. Reflecting the increasing awareness that world history can be examined through many different approaches and at varying geographic and chronological scales, each volume offers regional, topical, and comparative essays alongside case studies that provide depth of coverage to go with the breadth of vision that is the distinguishing characteristic of world history.

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VOLUME IV

A World with States, Empires, and Networks,
1200 BCE–900 CE

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Edited by

CRAIG BENJAMIN

Grand Valley State University



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Preface

The Cambridge Histories have long presented authoritative multi-volume overviews of historical topics, with chapters written by specialists. The first of these, the *Cambridge Modern History*, planned by Lord Acton and appearing after his death from 1902 to 1912, had fourteen volumes and served as the model for those that followed, which included the seven-volume *Cambridge Medieval History* (1911–1936), the twelve-volume *Cambridge Ancient History* (1924–1939), the thirteen-volume *Cambridge History of China* (1978–2009), and more specialized multi-volume works on countries, religions, regions, events, themes, and genres. These works are designed, as the *Cambridge History of China* puts it, to be the “largest and most comprehensive” history in the English language of their topic, and, as the *Cambridge History of Political Thought* asserts, to cover “every major theme.”

The *Cambridge World History* both follows and breaks with the model set by its august predecessors. Presenting the “largest and most comprehensive” history of the world would take at least three hundred volumes – and a hundred years – as would covering “every major theme.” Instead the series provides an overview of the dynamic field of world history in seven volumes over nine books. It covers all of human history, not simply that since the development of written records, in an expanded time frame that represents the newest thinking in world history. This broad time frame blurs the line between archaeology and history, and presents both as complementary approaches to the human past. The volume editors include archaeologists as well as historians, and have positions at universities in the United States, Britain, France, Australia, and Israel. The essays similarly draw on a broad author pool of historians, art historians, anthropologists, classicists, archaeologists, economists, linguists, sociologists, biologists, geographers, and area studies specialists, who come from universities in Australia, Britain, Canada, China, Estonia, France, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Singapore, and the United States. They include very senior scholars whose works have helped to form the field, and also mid-career and younger scholars whose research will continue to shape it in the future. Some of the authors are closely associated with the rise of world history as a distinct research and teaching field, while others describe what they do primarily as global history, transnational history, international history, or comparative history. (Several of the essays in Volume 1 trace the development of these overlapping, entangled, and at times competing fields.)

Many authors are simply specialists on their topic who the editors thought could best explain this to a broader audience or reach beyond their comfort zones into territory that was new.

Reflecting the increasing awareness that world history can be examined through many different approaches and at varying geographic and chronological scales, each volume offers several types of essays, including regional, topical, and comparative ones, along with case studies that provide depth to go with the breadth of vision that is the distinguishing characteristic of world history. Volume 1 introduces key frames of analysis that shape the making of world history across time periods, with essays on overarching approaches, methods, and themes. It then includes a group of essays on the Paleolithic, covering the 95 percent of human history up to 10,000 B C E. From that point on, each volume covers a shorter time period than its predecessor, with slightly overlapping chronologies volume to volume to reflect the complex periodization of a truly global history. The editors chose the overlapping chronologies, and stayed away from traditional period titles (e.g. “classical” or “early modern”) intentionally to challenge standard periodization to some degree. The overlapping chronologies also allow each volume to highlight geographic disjunctures and imbalances, and the ways in which various areas influenced one another. Each of the volumes centers on a key theme or cluster of themes that the editors view as central to the period covered in the volume and also as essential to an understanding of world history as a whole.

Volume 2 (*A World with Agriculture, 12,000 B C E–500 C E*) begins with the Neolithic, but continues into later periods to explore the origins of agriculture and agricultural communities in various regions of the world, as well as to discuss issues associated with pastoralism and hunter-fisher-gatherer economies. It traces common developments in the more complex social structures and cultural forms that agriculture enabled, and then presents a series of regional overviews accompanied by detailed case studies from many different parts of the world.

Volume 3 (*Early Cities and Comparative History, 4000 B C E–1200 C E*) focuses on early cities as motors of change in human society. Through case studies of cities and comparative chapters that address common issues, it traces the creation and transmission of administrative and information technologies, the performance of rituals, the distribution of power, and the relationship of cities with their hinterlands. It has a broad and flexible chronology to capture the development of cities in various regions of the world and the transformation of some cities into imperial capitals.

Volume 4 (*A World with States, Empires, and Networks, 1200 B C E–900 C E*) continues the analysis of processes associated with the creation of larger-scale political entities and networks of exchange, including those generally featured in accounts of the rise of “classical civilizations,” but with an expanded time frame that allows the inclusion of more areas of the world. It analyzes common social, economic, cultural, political, and technological developments, and includes chapters on slavery, religion, science, art, and gender. It then presents a series of regional overviews, each accompanied by a case study or two examining one smaller geographic area or topic within that region in greater depth.

Volume 5 (*Expanding Webs of Exchange and Conquest, 500–1500 C E*) highlights the growing networks of trade and cross-cultural interaction that were a hallmark of the millennium covered in the volume, including the expansion of text-based religions and the transmission of science, philosophy, and technology. It explores social structures, cultural institutions, and significant themes such as the environment, warfare, education, the

family, and courtly cultures on both a global and a Eurasian scale, and continues the examination of state formation begun in Volume 4 with chapters on polities and empires in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

The first five volumes each appear in a single book, but the last two are double volumes covering the periods conventionally known as the early modern and modern, an organization signaling the increasing complexity of an ever more globalized world in the last half millennium, as well as the expanding base of source materials and existing historical analyses for these more recent eras. Volume 6 (*The Construction of a Global World, 1400–1800 CE*) traces the increasing biological, commercial, and cultural exchanges of the period, and explores regional and transregional political, cultural, and intellectual developments. The first book within this volume, “Foundations,” focuses on global matrices that allowed this increasingly interdependent world to be created, including the environment, technology, and disease; crossroads and macro-regions such as the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, and Southeast Asia in which connections were especially intense; and large-scale political formations, particularly maritime and land-based empires such as Russia, the Islamic Empires, and the Iberian Empires that stretched across continents and seas. The second book within this volume, “Patterns of Change,” examines global and regional migrations and encounters, and the economic, social, cultural, and institutional structures that both shaped and were shaped by these, including trade networks, law, commodity flows, production processes, and religious systems.

Volume 7 (*Production, Destruction, and Connection, 1750–Present*) examines the uneven transition to a world with fossil fuels and an exploding human population that has grown ever more interactive through processes of globalization. The first book within this double volume, “Structures, Spaces, and Boundary Making,” discusses the material situations within which our crowded world has developed, including the environment, agriculture, technology, energy, and disease; the political movements that have shaped it, such as nationalism, imperialism, decolonization, and communism; and some of its key regions. The second book, “Shared Transformations?,” explores topics that have been considered in earlier volumes, including the family, urbanization, migration, religion, and science, along with some that only emerge as global phenomena in this era, such as sports, music, and the automobile, as well as specific moments of transition, including the Cold War and 1989.

Taken together, the volumes contain about two hundred essays, which means the *Cambridge World History* is comprehensive, but certainly not exhaustive. Each volume editor has made difficult choices about what to include and what to leave out, a problem for all world histories since those of Herodotus and Sima Qian more than two millennia ago. Each volume is arranged in the way that the volume editor or editors decided is most appropriate for the period, so that organizational schema differ slightly from volume to volume. Given the overlapping chronologies, certain topics are covered in several different volumes because they are important for understanding the historical processes at the heart of each of these, and because we as editors decided that viewing key developments from multiple perspectives is particularly appropriate for world history. As with other Cambridge Histories, the essays are relatively lightly footnoted, and include a short list of further readings, the first step for readers who want to delve deeper into the field. In contrast to other Cambridge Histories, all volumes are being published at the same time, for the leisurely pace of the print world that allowed publication over several decades does not fit with twenty-first-century digital demands.

In other ways as well, the *Cambridge World History* reflects the time in which it has been conceptualized and produced, just as the *Cambridge Modern History* did. Lord Acton envisioned his work, and Cambridge University Press described it, as “a history of the world,” although in only a handful of chapters out of several hundred were the principal actors individuals, groups, or polities outside of Europe and North America. This is not surprising, although the identical self-description of the *New Cambridge Modern History* (1957–1979), with a similar balance of topics, might be a bit more so. The fact that in 1957 – and even in 1979, when the last volume of the series appeared – Europe would be understood as “the world” and as the source of all that was modern highlights the power and longevity of the perspective we have since come to call “Eurocentric.” (In other languages, there are perspectives on world history that are similarly centered on the regions in which they have been produced.) The continued focus on Europe in the mid-twentieth century also highlights the youth of the fields of world and global history, in which the conferences, professional societies, journals, and other markers of an up-and-coming field have primarily emerged since the 1980s, and some only within the last decade. The *Journal of World History*, for example, was first published in 1990, the *Journal of Global History* in 2005, and *New Global Studies* in 2007.

World and global history have developed in an era of intense self-reflection in all academic disciplines, when no term can be used unself-consciously and every category must be complicated. Worries about inclusion and exclusion, about diversity and multivocality, are standard practice in sub-fields of history and related disciplines that have grown up in this atmosphere. Thus as we editors sought topics that would give us a balance between the traditional focus in world history on large-scale political and economic processes carried out by governments and commercial elites and newer concerns with cultural forms, representation, and meaning, we also sought to include topics that have been important in different national historiographies. We also attempted to find authors who would provide geographic balance along with a balance between older and younger voices. Although the author pool is decidedly broader geographically – and more balanced in terms of gender – than it was in either of the *Cambridge Modern Histories*, it is not as global as we had hoped. Contemporary world and global history is overwhelmingly Anglophone, and, given the scholarly diaspora, disproportionately institutionally situated in the United States and the United Kingdom. Along with other disparities in our contemporary world, this disproportion is, of course, the result of the developments traced in this series, though the authors might disagree about which volume holds the key to its origins, or whether one should spend much time searching for origins at all.

My hopes for the series are not as sweeping as Lord Acton's were for his, but fit with those of Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib, the editors of the two-volume *Cambridge Economic History of India* (1982). In the preface to their work, they comment: “We only dare to hope that our collaborative effort will stimulate discussion and help create new knowledge which may replace before many years the information and analysis offered in this volume.” In a field as vibrant as world and global history, I have no doubts that such new transformative knowledge will emerge quickly, but hope this series will provide an entrée to the field, and a useful overview of its state in the early twenty-first century.

MERRY E. WIESNER-HANKS

Introduction: the world from 1200 BCE to 900 CE

CRAIG BENJAMIN

This volume traces processes associated with the creation of large-scale political entities and networks of exchange, within a time frame that builds on and expands the usual limits of the classical era. It considers the formation and expansion of states and empires, and the attendant economic, political, social, cultural, and intellectual developments in various regions of the world. It explores these processes at three interacting scales. At the global scale, the initial chapters provide an overview of the key economic, political, social, cultural, and intellectual developments that occurred between 1200 BCE and 900 CE. Chapters at the interregional level focus more tightly on developments in a number of clearly defined political and cultural entities within the four distinct world zones of the period – Afro-Eurasia, the Americas, Australasia, and Oceania. These interregional perspectives are then complemented by a series of regional studies, which use a “close-up” view of events to illustrate the developments and patterns identified at the interregional and global scales. This introductory chapter offers a brief global-scale overview of some of the key developments in the evolution of states, empires, and networks between *c.* 1200 BCE and *c.* 900 CE.

Introduction

When the sun rose above the eastern horizon on the first day of the year world historians designate as 1200 Before the Common Era (BCE), its rays progressively illuminated the continents and oceans of earth. As the world spun on its axis, light spread westwards across the face of the globe, and night gave way to day. The earth was almost 4.6 billion years old, one of a number of planets and smaller objects orbiting an obscure, medium-sized star in the spiraling Milky Way Galaxy, home to perhaps 200 billion other stars. Yet of all the planets, moons, and asteroids in the solar system upon which the sun shone that day, only one was known to be home to life, which covered its surfaces and

deeps in teeming variety. Each one of these countless organisms was a product of evolutionary processes that had begun with the emergence of archaeobacterial life forms some 3.8 billion years earlier, and each was perfectly adapted to the environmental niche in which it dwelt. Although all of these life forms were extraordinary in their own way, one relative newcomer had proven exceptionally versatile since making its modest appearance somewhere in Central Africa 200,000 years earlier, and which now occupied every continent on earth with the exception of Antarctica. It is with the affairs of this species – *Homo sapiens* (or “wise man”) – between c. 1200 BCE and c. 900 CE that this volume is principally concerned. In this introductory chapter we unfold the events of that period as though they took place in a single day, from “sunrise” in the Year 1200 BCE to “sunset” more than two millennia later in the Year 900 of the Common Era (CE). *Homo sapiens* are a product of hominid evolution, a unique bipedal species descended from some common ancestor of both apes and hominids that lived approximately 7 million years ago. As a result of geographical isolation through earthquake or some other natural event, a small group of hominids had found themselves isolated and following a different evolutionary path to other members of their *homininae* genus. The result was the emergence of a large-brained hominine, *Homo sapiens*, which possessed specialized cognitive abilities that eventually facilitated the acquisition of complex, symbolic language. This had given *Homo sapiens* an adaptive advantage that had allowed them to prosper and spread at the expense of their closest hominine relatives, *Homo erectus* and *Homo neanderthalis*. By c. 27,000 years ago only one type of hominine remained on the planet – *Homo sapiens* – already distinguished as one of the most remarkable, but also most dangerous, species on earth.

After pursuing a nomadic, hunter-foraging lifeway for 190,000 years or so, some groups of humans had adopted agriculture and sedentism from c. 9000 BCE, an “agrarian revolution” that set human history off upon different trajectories. In those regions where agricultural lifeways were pursued, some villages evolved into towns and cities, and by c. 3200 BCE complex societies had emerged in southwest Asia and northeast Africa. In the centuries that followed, the increasingly powerful leaders of these early states learned to control larger regions and more and more resources, until by c. 1200 BCE huge agrarian civilizations, each ruled by coercive political structures called “states,” controlled substantial portions of the Afro-Eurasian world zone. Historians have traced the experiences of these agrarian civilizations across large scales of time and space. Many of the chapters in this volume are concerned with the history of these civilizational structures, the

cities and states that sustained them, and the networks of exchange that connected them together into vast webs between c. 1200 BCE and c. 900 CE.

In many other regions, however, humans had continued to follow the foraging, nomadic lifeways of our ancestors and had not even adopted agriculture and sedentism, let alone states and civilizations. It was the agricultural revolution that created different human histories, then, because the hitherto shared and common global experience of hunting and foraging that continued in some regions was replaced in others. In parts of Afro-Eurasia and later the Americas, historical change began to occur at a faster pace and on larger scales than was the case in, for example, Australia, where aboriginal people continued to pursue their perfectly adapted foraging lifeways. As the sun rose on the first day of the year we now think of as 1200 BCE, some 8,000 years after the first appearance of agriculture and sedentism, this extraordinary variety of human lifeways was very much in evidence.

Setting aside the fact that on the first day of January of any new year the sun is shining continuously above the frozen continent of Antarctica, the sun's first rays fall initially upon a part of the earth just to the west of the International Date Line, an imaginary line extending north-south across the Pacific Ocean. Dawn then progresses from east to west, with the moment of sunrise being recorded according to a series of local time measurements. The first point of land to be touched by the light would probably have been a headland near Victor Bay in Antarctica, but in 1200 BCE this was a place completely uninhabited by humans. Further north, however, early sunlight found the mountains, forests, and coral-fringed beaches of thousands of scattered Pacific islands, many of which were most certainly occupied by humans.

Oceania world zone

This occupation was a result of the most extraordinary maritime migrations in human history, which occurred largely within the 2,100-year period of principal interest to this volume. Sometime around 1500 BCE migrants from the Tongan and Samoan island groups had begun a series of lengthy ocean voyages in large canoes. Navigating by the stars, these mariners settled in parts of the Cook Islands and Tahiti-nui. A later wave of migration resulted in the spread of these Polynesian peoples as far east as Rapa Nui (Easter Island) by 300 CE, and as far north as Hawai'i by 400. A third wave of migrations occurred late in our "day" when groups from the Cook or Society Islands eventually settled Aotearoa (New Zealand) in the ninth century. By the time

European explorers began to survey the Pacific in the sixteenth century, Polynesian and Melanesian peoples had occupied virtually every single habitable island in the Pacific.

The inhabitants of these widely scattered islands practiced a variety of lifeways somewhere along the continuum between nomadic foraging and sedentary agrarian states. Archaeological evidence reveals distinctive Polynesian agrarian and fishing technologies in most of the island groups, based on the successful domestication of plants like taro, breadfruit, banana, coconut, and sweet potato, and of animals including the pig, dog, and chicken. On Rapa Nui and Hawai'i, coercive leaders emerged to control state-like structures complete with most of their defining characteristics – monumental architecture (notably the *Ahu* of Rapa Nui), the accumulation of surpluses, and inter-tribal conflict. Rapa Nui also provides early evidence of the potential for humans to self-destructively impact the natural environment. Encouraged by their chiefs, intra-village competitive monument building (again of the *Ahu*) resulted in the impoverishment of a previously vibrant society through rapid deforestation. Yet on Rapa Nui and elsewhere, sunrise on any day late in the chronology of our volume would have found hundreds of thousands of farmers and fishermen, leaders and servants, warriors and builders, all going about their business upon the forest-covered islands, atolls, and deep-blue surface of the Pacific.¹

Australasian world zone

The harsh southern hemisphere summer sun next beat down upon the highlands of New Guinea, and the plains and bush-covered regions of Australia, a vast continent located along the southwestern edge of the Pacific Basin. To the casual observer of this world zone, time might appear to have stood still. In the jungles of New Guinea, which humans had begun to occupy perhaps 60,000 years earlier, farmers had been following early agrarian lifeways based on small-scale horticulture and slash-and-burn technologies since perhaps 5000 BCE. There were villages aplenty in the forests, but none of these had evolved into towns or states, and power in these communities was still consensual rather than coercive. Yet agricultural practices were sophisticated; some agri-historians believe that New Guinea farmers understood the principles of crop rotation, mulching, and tillaging long before Eurasian farmers did.

1 See McNiven, "Australasia and the Pacific," Chapter 22, this volume.

In Australia, the ancestors of the aboriginal people had arrived by sea from Southeast Asia 50,000 years earlier, demonstrating advanced boat building and navigational skills that had made them amongst the most technologically sophisticated people on earth at that time. By c. 1200 BCE the aboriginal population numbered anywhere between 300,000 and 750,000, with the densest concentrations living in the southeast of the continent. Their languages were many, up to 750 different dialects, although similarities in the phoneme sets indicate a probable single common origin. The variety of dialects might also suggest a wide range of lifeways, but to our casual observer daylight revealed indigenous Australians engaged in a set of semi-unified cultural practices.

Whether in the arid interior of Australia, in the great tracts of eastern bushland, or along the coasts, the overwhelming majority of aboriginals remained semi-nomadic hunter-foragers from the time they first migrated to the continent until the arrival of Europeans. Each group had its own traditional territories, which were defined by geographic markers like rivers, mountains, and lakes, and the well-being of these lands was fundamental to the success of the people. Indigenous Australians “cared” for their environments in the manner of foraging peoples everywhere, although paleo-aboriginals unwittingly contributed to the extinction of many large animal species in Australia, and their practice of fire-stick farming helped lead to the eventual desertification of much of the continent. There were some exceptions to this nomadic lifeway, like the Gunditjmara people of Western Victoria, who supported a semi-sedentary lifeway through eel farming. Archaeologists have found the remains of hundreds of permanent huts, 75 square kilometers (45 square miles) of artificial channels and ponds for farming the eels, and trees used for smoking the product to facilitate its transportation to other parts of southeast Australia.

With the exception of the Gunditjmara, any dawn across Australia during our two-millennia “day” would have revealed small groups of humans fishing with fishbone-tipped spears; others hunting kangaroos with wooden weapons like the boomerang or woomera spear-thrower; and yet others (particularly women) using wooden and stone digging sticks to access nutritious roots and insects living just below ground. At a number of sacred sites across the landscape, elders prepared to pass on oral creation stories from the Dreamtime, when humans, animals, and spirits all emerged and peopled the land. Critical to the spiritual practices of indigenous Australians were music and dance, and both men and women had been up since dawn, preparing to perform ritualized dance-like ceremonies, accompanied by

vocalists, percussionists, and musicians, at large ceremonial gatherings called corroborees, where goods, ideas, and marriage partners would also be exchanged.²

Afro-Eurasian world zone

As the corroborees were gathering in the Australian outback, further to the north sunrise drew steam from the dense jungles of Southeast Asia, on the fringes of Afro-Eurasia. The adoption of agriculture in multiple places across this vast world zone had led to the emergence of cities, states, dense populations, professional leaders, military, and religious elites, and complex intra- and interstate political relations that would have seemed utterly alien to Pacific Islanders and Australian aboriginals. Given the political focus of our volume, this brief survey will identify the key developments in state and empire construction that occurred between c. 1200 BCE and c. 900 CE, and highlight the critical networks of exchange that developed between all the different types of human communities that populated the Afro-Eurasian world zone.

Humans had occupied the islands and mainland of Southeast Asia since Paleolithic times, and during the centuries preceding 1200 BCE they had gathered together into a range of agrarian communities. The country known today as Vietnam developed its own distinctive culture during the first millennium BCE, but from the moment the Qin Dynasty unified much of China in the third century BCE, Vietnam had been seen by the Chinese as an almost inevitable part of their empire. After being colonized by the Han Dynasty soon afterwards, the Vietnamese decided to adopt important cultural ideas from the Chinese, including Confucian and Buddhist ideology, but also to fiercely resist political assimilation. This resistance came to fruition late in this volume's day, and by 939 the Vietnamese had won a political independence they were destined to keep until French colonialists turned up in the nineteenth century.

A powerful state, based on political and commercial control of the narrow Isthmus of Kra, also developed in Malaysia, where the rulers of Funan used Indian models of power to declare themselves *rajas*. After the fall of Funan in the sixth century, leadership of the region passed to the Srivijaya state on the island of Sumatra, which constructed a formidable navy that dominated the port cities of Southeast Asia between 670 and 1025 CE. Once in control of all

2 See McNiven, Chap. 22, this volume.

the major sea lanes, the rulers of Srivijaya grew wealthy through their role as intermediaries in the thriving spice routes trade between India and China, itself part of a much wider Afro-Eurasian maritime network of commercial and cultural exchanges that had been flourishing since the first millennium BCE. By the tenth century CE, the Srivijaya capital of Palembang was a thriving commercial hub in which merchants from many ethnicities and belief systems went about their lucrative daily business amongst the docks and warehouses of the port. On the mainland meanwhile, in present-day Cambodia, the Khmer people were in the process of constructing a soon-to-be powerful kingdom known as Angkor, which would rule for more than 500 years and erect, at Angkor Thom and Angkor Wat, two of the most extraordinary religious complexes in world history.

North again, along the western shores of the Pacific, the thousands of islands of the Japanese archipelago were also enjoying the “rising sun,” a symbol that in the seventh century CE inspired rulers Tenmo and Jito to actually name their country *Nippon* – the “base of the sun.” Humans had come to Japan perhaps 35,000 years earlier and had eventually made the transition from foraging to farming. During the first millennium BCE, migrants from Korea introduced new pottery, technologies, and lifeways to create the Yayoi Culture. Rice agriculture expanded throughout the islands, leading to increased populations and the appearance of social hierarchies and coercive power structures. In the third century CE, one of these rulers had been a woman, the enigmatic shaman Queen Himiko. The power of Himiko and the other rulers of the period is still visible today in the massive tombs they left behind. However, it was the arrival of Buddhism and its accompanying hierarchy, along with the promulgation of laws and a constitution by Prince Shotoku early in the seventh century, which really consolidated and centralized power in Japan, until a fully fledged imperial court system was in place in the great wooden city of Nara. In 794 a decision was made to build a new capital at Heian in modern Kyoto, a city destined to be the capital of Japan for the next thousand years. But just as the sun was setting on the ninth century, the authority of the Heian emperor was being superseded by members of the Fujiwara clan, who functioned as the real power behind the Japanese throne until late in the twelfth century.³

In the Korean Peninsula, to the west across a narrow strait from Japan, the process of building a unified state had been similarly complicated. Paleolithic migrants had practiced hunting and foraging for perhaps 50,000 years, until

3 See Holcombe, “East Asia,” Chapter 15, this volume.

the adoption of agriculture had led to increased populations and villages. Bronze technology appeared in the first millennium BCE, but it was the introduction of iron tools and weapons in the second century BCE that dramatically increased agricultural productivity. At about the same time, as with Vietnam, the Chinese had come to regard the Korean Peninsula as part of their domain, and for almost 400 years much of Korea had been a colony of the Chinese. In the midst of this, three regional kingdoms emerged, Paekche, Koguryo, and Silla. By 313 CE the northern Koguryo kingdom had driven the Chinese out, but this only led to centuries of bitter conflict between the three rival states during the ensuing “Three Kingdoms Period.” Indeed, seemingly endless interregional and trans-regional conflict characterized the history of much of Afro-Eurasia throughout virtually all of the period covered by this volume.

Ongoing tensions between Koguryo and the Chinese helped the southern kingdoms of Silla and Paekche grow stronger. Archaeological evidence shows an increase in social hierarchy in burial practices, and also the emergence of intense specialization in pottery manufacturing by an artisan class under elite patronage. Each of the three ruling dynasties adopted Buddhism, although Confucianism and Daoism were also widely practiced. The Chinese Sui Dynasty attempted to invade Korea in 612, but Koguryo forces killed thousands of Chinese troops and inflicted a defeat on the Chinese so humiliating it contributed significantly to the demise of the Sui. Eventually Silla forged an alliance with the Chinese Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE), which resulted in the defeat of the other two kingdoms. The Tang then attempted to recolonize Korea, but this was thwarted by Silla, who went on to unify and rule southern Korea until late in the ninth century. But at the end of our “day,” early in the tenth century, two powerful generals, Wang Kon and Kyonwhon, were engaged in a virtual civil war, which led to the abdication of the last Silla king in 935 and his replacement by Wang Kon and his new Koryo Dynasty, the state that gave the modern nation of Korea its name.⁴

On the mainland of East Asia, morning sunlight in c. 1200 BCE illuminated the astonishing geo-diversity of China: a 9,000 mile coastline dotted with thousands of islands, two of the greatest river systems on the planet, steppe grasslands in the north, tropical wetlands in the southeast, inhospitable deserts, and great mountain systems that include seven of the world’s fourteen highest peaks in the west. By 1200 BCE these environments were already home to an ancient and complex civilization. Early farming

4 See Holcombe, Chap. 15, this volume.

communities along the Yangtze and Huang He river systems had evolved into a series of sophisticated cultures like Yangshao and Longshan, a process that by the late third millennium BCE led to the appearance of powerful dynastic states such as the Xia, Shang, and Zhou. But Zhou central rule, so stable and impressive for the first 500 years, collapsed in the sixth century BCE to be replaced by half a millennium of bitter conflict. It was during this age of “warring states” that hundreds of schools of political and ideological thought developed in China, from which the three great philosophies of Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism emerged to guide Chinese political and religious thinking for the millennia that followed.⁵ During the third century the most powerful of the warring kingdoms used Legalism to secure victory over its rivals and reunify much of China in the name of the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BCE).

The brief period of Qin rule paved the way for the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), which used a combination of the three ideologies, but particularly Confucianism, to build a well-organized and wealthy bureaucratic state. It was also during the Han dynastic era that China became connected for the first time with the rest of Afro-Eurasia via the Silk Roads, the greatest trade and cultural exchange network of the premodern world. The involvement of the Chinese in Silk Roads trade meant that virtually every state, nomadic confederation, small-scale agrarian community, and even remaining hunter-gatherer bands in this vast world zone were now connected into a single exchange network for the first time in history.⁶

During the third century CE, Silk Roads trade declined dramatically as the key players in the network – the Han, Kushans, Parthians, and Romans – all withdrew. The Later Han suffered from a dearth of effective leadership, and a series of peasant uprisings led to the demise of the dynasty in 220, and to centuries of internal disunity and conflict. The first emperor of the Sui Dynasty (581–618 CE) ended this “Age of Disunity,” but the abortive campaign against the Korean Koguryo kingdom noted above, and a massive “Grand Canal” engineering project completed by the second Sui emperor Yangdi, fostered so much resentment that the emperor was assassinated in 618.

A Sui governor named Li Yuan instituted a new dynasty, the Tang, which went on to rule China for the next three centuries. The Tang organized China into a powerful, prosperous, unified, and culturally sophisticated imperial state. The Early Tang Era was marked by strong and benevolent

5 See Yao, “Confucianism and the State,” Chapter 16, this volume.

6 See von Reden, “Global Economic History,” Chapter 2, this volume.

rule, successful diplomatic relationships across much of Eurasia, economic and military expansion, and a rich cosmopolitan culture that resulted in the production of superb literature and visual art,⁷ and also in increasingly complex and sophisticated relations between men and women.⁸ It is probably no exaggeration to suggest that during the Tang Dynasty China was the wealthiest and most powerful state thus far seen in world history. Tang wealth and stability ushered in another great age of commercial and cultural exchange across Afro-Eurasia. As we will see below, Tang control of Eastern Eurasia corresponded with the Islamic caliphates (and to a lesser extent the Byzantine Empire) gaining control of much of Western Eurasia. With strong, commercially minded states also in place in Central Asia, material goods, ideas, and diseases flooded back and forth across the world zone in a second great Silk Roads Era, which continued to operate, although with lesser intensity, even after the collapse of the Tang in 907.⁹

North and west of the mountain ranges and deserts that had kept China isolated from Central Asia for millennia were the great steppe grasslands, the realm of pastoral nomads who played a vital role in facilitating exchange between empires and states throughout much of the period of this volume. Pastoral nomads formed communities that lived primarily from the exploitation of domestic animals such as cattle, sheep, camels, or horses. The appearance of burial mounds across the steppes of Inner Eurasia shows that some of these communities became semi-nomadic during the fourth millennium BCE. By the middle of the first millennium BCE, several large pastoral nomadic communities had emerged with the military skills and technologies, and the endurance and mobility, to raid and even dominate sedentary agrarian states and empires. Some of them, such as the Saka, Xiongnu, and Yuezhi, established powerful confederations that controlled the vast steppe lands between civilizations.¹⁰ Because they could survive in the deserts and mountainous interior of Inner Eurasia, it was the nomads who facilitated the linking up of all the different lifeways and communities. Ultimately, it was the role of pastoralists as facilitators and protectors (as well as periodic raiders) of mercantile exchange that allowed the Silk Roads and other networks to flourish.¹¹

7 See Bagley, "Art", Chapter 8, this volume.

8 See Yao and Wells, "The Gendering of Power in the Family and the State," Chapter 3, this volume, and "Discourses on Gender and Sexuality," Chapter 7, this volume.

9 See Holcombe, Chap. 15, this volume.

10 See May, "Pastoral Nomads," Chapter 9, this volume.

11 See Liu, "Exchanges within the Silk Roads World System," Chapter 17, this volume.

In the middle of the first millennium CE, new groups of Turkic-speaking pastoral nomads appeared on the scene, who were destined to have a profound impact on enormous areas of Eurasia. References to the Turks in sixth- and seventh-century Chinese sources describe a great Turkic empire stretching from Mongolia almost to the Black Sea. This Oghuz Empire was forced to accept Tang Chinese hegemony in the seventh century, leading to the migration of different groups of Turks out of Central Asia toward the west. In the centuries that followed, migrating Turks established political structures all across the region and exerted a powerful influence upon states within the Byzantine, Islamic, and Indian realms.¹²

The Indian subcontinent lies far to the south beyond the high Tibetan Plateau and even higher Himalaya, and daylight in the Year 1200 BCE highlighted a fragmented polity of small kingdoms and competitive states. Between c. 2600 and c. 1900 BCE, the Indus Valley in the northwest of the subcontinent had functioned as a vibrant and unified political, commercial, and cultural zone historians now call the Indus civilization. But following the collapse of the Indus civilization, the millennium-long Vedic Age that followed the arrival of Indo-Aryan migrants in c. 1500 BCE was characterized by political disunity as numerous regional *rajās* (kings) jostled for power. In the fourth century BCE, the defeat of one of these local kings by the adventurer Alexander of Macedon facilitated the rise to power of Chandragupta Maurya, who went on to unify much of India under the Mauryan Empire (332–185 BCE). After the death of Chandragupta's grandson Ashoka, the Mauryan Empire entered a period of economic decline, and by 185 BCE it had collapsed. Much of India was fragmented again for the next five centuries, although in the north nomadic invaders established their own states that controlled large areas of India, such as the powerful Kushan Empire (c. 45–250 CE).¹³

Imperial rule and unification returned to India with the establishment of the Gupta Empire (c. 320–414 CE). Founder Chandra Gupta (no relation to the Mauryan emperor) created a dynamic kingdom in the Ganges Valley that his successors expanded until it approached the territorial size of the Mauryans. The great Mauryan capital city of Pataliputra was revived as the imperial capital, and stability returned to most of the subcontinent north of the Deccan Plateau. Mauryan centralized imperial administration was replaced with a more decentered form of provincial government by the Guptas, who presided over a cultural and intellectual “golden age.” But after having to deal with an invasion by the nomadic Hephthalites in the fifth century, the Gupta

12 See May, Chap. 9, this volume. 13 See Kaul, “South Asia,” Chapter 18, this volume.

realm slowly contracted and eventually disappeared. A brief attempt to reunify the subcontinent was made by Prince Harsha (r. 606–648), but local rulers had amassed too much regional power to accede to a single, central authority. Following Harsha's death at the hands of an assassin, India reverted to a divided realm before the arrival of Islam in the ninth century ushered in a new stage of commercial vitality but also political and religious tension.¹⁴

Back north of the Himalaya to the western regions of Central Asia and the Iranian Plateau, which had long functioned as a natural crossroads through which numerous migrating hominids had passed, including both *Homo erectus* and Paleolithic *Homo sapiens* moving out of Africa. In the early second millennium BCE, traders and irrigation farmers had constructed an important series of commercial state-like structures known today as the Oxus Civilization.¹⁵ Different groups of pastoral nomads also migrated into the region, notably the highly militarized Saka, also the Medes and Persians. In the sixth century BCE, under the leadership of Cyrus (r. 558–530 BCE), the Persians set out on a series of expansionary campaigns and built a vast Achaemenid Empire that eventually stretched from Afghanistan to Greece. Controlling an area of some 3 million square miles, or more than 10 percent of the land surface of the earth, this was the largest agrarian civilization the world had ever seen. The Achaemenids overreached themselves by launching an attack on the Greek peninsula and a Persian army sent by Darius in 490 BCE was defeated on the plains of Marathon. Ten years later, Darius' successor Xerxes invaded Greece with probably the largest military force ever assembled to this point in world history, but the Spartans famously forestalled the Persians at Thermopylae, and the Athenians destroyed the Persian fleet at Salamis. It was Alexander of Macedon who eventually brought an end to the Achaemenids with his victory over Darius II at Gaugamela in 331 BCE.¹⁶

But this was not the end of Persian domination of Iran and Central Asia. The Achaemenids were succeeded in the region by two more powerful Persian empires, those of the Parthians (247 BCE – 224 CE), and the Sasanians (224–651 CE). Under Mithridates I (r. 170–138 BCE) the Parthians used their considerable military skill to build an imperial state that extended from the eastern edge of the Iranian Plateau down into the flat lands of Mesopotamia. By maintaining a reasonably stable empire for so long, the

¹⁴ See Kaul, "Pataliputra," Chapter 19, this volume.

¹⁵ See Lerner, "Bactria: The Crossroads of Ancient Eurasia," Chapter 11, this volume.

¹⁶ See Daryaei, "Western and Central Eurasia," Chapter 10, this volume.

Parthians helped facilitate high levels of cultural exchange across Afro-Eurasia during the first Silk Roads Era. The Sasanians also constructed an enormous imperial state that acted as a geographic bridge between China and the West, and a chronological bridge between the ancient civilizations and the new Islamic states that went on to control these vast arid lands.

In the seventh century CE, much of West and Central Asia came under the control of these new Islamic states, with the Abbasid Caliphate in particular (750–1228 CE) providing stability and cultural unity across an enormous Afro-Eurasian realm. The lightning-fast expansion of the *Dar al-Islam* (Abode of Islam) was unprecedented, even during an era in which great empires grew rapidly to enormous size. Expanding out of a small area of the Arabian Peninsula, by 637 Syria, Palestine, and all of Mesopotamia had fallen to Islam; during the 640s so did much of North Africa; and by 651 the Sasanian Empire had also fallen to Muslim armies. Expansion resumed early in the eighth century, into northern India in 711; and to the Atlantic coast of Morocco, then across the Straits of Gibraltar and into Spain by 718. The Abbasid Caliphate put in place centralized bureaucracies, minted coins, controlled taxes, and maintained a standing professional army. With a steady flow of tributary revenue coming in from all over the Islamic world, Baghdad was beautified with magnificent buildings, mosques, and squares, and by the end of our volume's era it was one of the great commercial, financial, industrial, and intellectual cities of the world.¹⁷

Dawn on the islands and glittering waters of the Mediterranean Sea illuminated a region that Phoenicians, Egyptians, Minoans, and Mycenaean had all used to conduct trade and occasional conquest. The Phoenicians established small commercial city-states and a host of colonies through the Mediterranean region, and used these to conduct lucrative regional trade for four centuries between c. 1200 and 800 BCE. The Minoans, based on the island of Crete, had also been commercially and culturally active, but by 1100 BCE they were under the control of Mycenaean raiders from the mainland. There followed a period of mysterious collapse across much of the Mediterranean, but by the ninth century BCE the Greek communities were in the process of constructing a new, vigorous commercial and cultural society based on a series of poleis or city-states, that eventually spread by colonization across the entire Mediterranean Basin.¹⁸ But the Greeks, despite their extraordinary cultural, philosophical, and

¹⁷ See Bagley, Chap. 8, this volume.

¹⁸ See Morison, "Athens in the Fifth Century BCE," Chapter 13, this volume.

scientific achievements,¹⁹ were never politically unified, and after successfully defending themselves against the Persians through a rare display of collective response, Classical Greek civilization essentially self-destructed through a bloody civil Peloponnesian War. It was this conflict that facilitated the rise of Philip VI of Macedon and his son Alexander, who embarked upon a campaign of personal conquest and, as we have seen, helped destroy the Achaemenid Persians and also made possible the unification of India under Chandragupta.

Toward the end of the first millennium BCE, most of the Mediterranean Basin and adjacent inland regions came under the control of the Romans, who went on to establish an enormous state that controlled large regions of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa for centuries. According to the terms of the first constitution of 509 BCE, the Roman state functioned as a republic administered by Consuls and a Senate, although additional officials, including two “tribunes of the people,” were later added. The republican system worked well for a time, but the growth in size of the state and the appearance of powerful men with private armies led to a century of civil war until Augustus claimed power as the *princeps* or “first man in Rome.” The *princeps* quickly transitioned into an emperor, and for the first half of the first millennium CE Rome was a vast imperial state that used slavery much more extensively than any other state during this era.²⁰ But the political unity of the early empire began to unravel following the migration into the Western Roman Empire of Germanic tribes in the third century CE. With the empire under pressure, the Emperor Constantine decided (early in the fourth century) to divide his realm into two, and while the western half came under continuing stress, the eastern realm prospered from its new capital at Constantinople.²¹

The city of Rome was sacked by Gothic raiders in 410 CE, and again in 455 by a Vandal raiding party crossing from North Africa. These and other Germanic tribes then settled across much of the former Western Roman Empire, where some like the Franks and Angles established long-lasting kingdoms. Historians used to date the “fall of the Roman Empire” to the year 476 CE, when one German Roman Emperor, Romulus Augustulus, was killed by another, Odovocar. Historians today prefer to avoid terminology and periodization that articulates clean breaks and to use a more nuanced

19 See Schneider, “Developments in Science and Technology c. 800 BCE to c. 800 CE,” Chapter 6, this volume.

20 See Hunt, “Slavery,” Chapter 4, this volume.

21 See Benjamin and Wiesner-Hanks, “The Mediterranean,” Chapter 12, this volume.

phrase like “the world of later antiquity” to describe processes that continued in the region into the second half of the millennium. During this period different forces, secular and sacred, struggled for ascendancy. The Catholic Church played an increasingly important role as the Pope in Rome attempted to assert both spiritual and political authority. In the late sixth century, missionaries of Pope Gregory were sent to Britain to convert the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. The structure established in Britain by Gregory’s missionaries (with bishops supervised by archbishops, who in turn answered to Rome) became the standard model for church administration, and thereafter the Catholic Church functioned almost as a state within the wider framework of regional political states.

In an attempt to reestablish a stable political state in the former Western Roman Empire, the kingdom of the Franks forged an alliance with the Church in the sixth century, and by the time of his death in 511, the Frankish king Clovis I had succeeded in uniting the Franks and creating a Merovingian Dynasty in southern Gaul. A very able descendant of Clovis, Charles the Great (Charlemagne, 742–814), later established a substantial Carolingian Empire that managed to reunify much of Western Europe under strong central government. But the empire was fleeting, and following Charlemagne’s death it was divided between his three grandsons. As the “day” of our volume drew to its close, much of Western Europe was about to come under deadly attack from Vikings, Magyars, and Saracens, creating a crisis that would lead to the establishment of strong national European states in the centuries that followed.²²

While the former Western Roman Empire remained essentially fragmented, the Eastern Empire went from strength to strength. Constantine’s selection of the strategic and highly defensible site of Constantinople (Byzantium) for his new capital helped ensure that Greco-Roman culture was preserved for another thousand years in what became known as the Byzantine Empire (330–1453 CE). In the sixth century the Emperor Justinian carried out a tremendous urban renewal of the capital following a disastrous earthquake, and until its eventual sacking at the hands of Ottoman Turks in 1453, impregnable Constantinople was called the “the fortress of the world.” But the survival of the Byzantine state was never a sure thing. Some emperors were literally driven insane by the problems they faced, including invasions by Avars and Bulgars, sustained attempts by Islamic armies to destroy the empire, and bitter religious schisms over icons and

22 See Pazdernik, “Late Antiquity in Europe c. 300–900 CE,” Chapter 14, this volume.

disagreements with the Pope in Rome. However, for much of the ninth and tenth centuries that conclude our volume's chronology, the Byzantines enjoyed a "golden age" of political stability, commercial vitality, and cultural sophistication.

Of increasing interest to the Byzantines were the forests and swamps to the northeast of their empire, the realms of Slavic peoples who were pushed onto the historical stage by the migrations of Central Asian peoples in the fifth and sixth centuries. Slavic peoples followed lifeways that included slash-and-burn horticulture, hunting in the deep forests, and trading forest products like honey, wax, and furs. But Slavic communities were increasingly conquered and controlled by a number of external groups, with both their political and their spiritual allegiances fought over by competing versions of Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, and by Islam. The Slavs were destined to play a critical role in the history of Russia, Ukraine, and Eastern Europe, and by the end of the millennium had already organized themselves into a series of regional states.

South again now, south of Europe and the Mediterranean, we follow the line of light into the vast continent of Africa, which even by c. 1200 BCE had been an integral part of Afro-Eurasian trade and cultural exchange networks for millennia. Africa is a continent of extraordinary ecological and geographical diversity. The northern regions are dominated by the Sahara Desert, which stretches from the Atlantic Coast to the Red Sea and has been home to nomadic Bedouin peoples for thousands of years. The northeastern corner of Saharan Africa was the location for one of the oldest civilizations in all world history, Ancient Egypt. By c. 1200 BCE Egyptian civilization was already approaching the end of its third major chronological period, which historians call the New Kingdom (c. 1550–1150 BCE). The powerful pharaoh Rameses II had just concluded a campaign of vigorous conquest in Palestine and Syria, but following his death in 1224 the state fragmented and suffered invasions by Libyans, Kushites, and Assyrians. The end of Egyptian independence came in 525 BCE when Egypt was incorporated into the Achaemenid Persian Empire; by late in that same millennium, Egypt had become part of the Roman Empire.²³

Despite the success of Egyptian civilization in using the Nile River to tame the harsh Sahara, the most hospitable environment for humans in the African continent is the great savannah grasslands where early hominids and *Homo sapiens* had evolved and flourished. Along the line of the Equator lies dense

23 See Burstein, "Africa: States, Empires and Connections," Chapter 23, this volume.

tropical rainforest, occupying some 7 percent of the continent. The jungle is less conducive to agriculture and grazing, but human communities had learned to survive and prosper there through foraging, hunting, and slash-and-burn agriculture. Early sub-Saharan African peoples followed Paleolithic lifeways, hunting with spears and bows and arrows (often tipped with poisons), and gathering wild plants such as fruits, nuts, melons, roots, and tubers. Even when some groups began to adopt agriculture (perhaps from as early as 8000 BCE), others continued to practice hunting and gathering. Agriculture flourished in conducive regions, with sorghum, rice, peas, and nuts being cultivated in the Sudan from perhaps 4000 BCE; grains, millets, sesame, and mustard in the Ethiopian highlands by 3000 BCE; bananas (which were probably brought to Africa by Malays via Madagascar) and coffee in the jungles; and widespread successful domestication of livestock, including cattle, sheep, and goats.

Ironworking technology appeared in sub-Saharan East Africa as early as the seventh century BCE and was rapidly diffused westwards to Nok (modern-day Nigeria). In the center of the period of most interest to our volume, so between c. 500 BCE and c. 500 CE, Bantu peoples had spread south and east from their West African homelands to occupy and, to a certain extent, culturally and linguistically unify substantial regions of sub-Saharan Africa. By the year 900 CE, Africa was home to a diverse yet loosely unified array of complex cultures and states that were products of these earlier processes of cultural evolution and diffusion.

On the east coast, the region known as Ethiopia and Eritrea today was home to one of the continent's longest and most enduring cultures. To the north, Nubians and Kushites had traded and fought with the ancient Egyptians thousands of years earlier; and by 800 BCE, Arabian traders from Saba had begun to establish trading settlements along the Eritrean coast. The resultant Sabaeen culture prospered through successful commerce. By the fourth century CE, the Ethiopian state of Aksum was dominating Red Sea trade, exporting exotic goods and slaves in exchange for glass, wine, and cloth, even issuing its own coins. Aksum's King Ezana (r. 320–350) converted to Christianity, but three centuries later, in 615, Aksum gave refuge to a group of followers of the Prophet Muhammad, an act that heralded rapid Muslim expansion into East Africa. By the eighth century Islamic merchants dominated the coastal trade, but in the interior Christian groups continued to campaign against the coastal Muslims until as late as the sixteenth century.

Further south, the arrival of Bantu peoples along this stretch of the east coast had impacted the pace of historical change. The language that emerged

(called Swahili after the Arabic word for coast, *sawahil*) gave its name to the entire coastal region. Although agriculturalists were successful, the region developed rapidly because of trade with merchants from the Mediterranean and the Arabian Peninsula. The early mariners' handbook, the *Periplus of the Erythrian Sea* (c. 40/50 CE), lists several trading ports along the Swahili Coast, and through most of the first millennium Indian Ocean trade flourished, based on the export of ivory, rhinoceros horn, and turtle shells. The arrival of Islam intensified maritime trade, so that by the end of our period large commercial dhows were already navigating the deep waters of the Indian Ocean.

In West Africa, Berbers and agriculturalists of the Western Sudan and Niger Delta created wealthy states based on trade in gold, salt, and slaves. The Sahara was crisscrossed by a network of trading routes along which camel caravans transported these prized exports north to the Mediterranean coast. An initially small West African state known as Ghana (after its legendary warrior founder of the same name) commenced a period of sustained prosperity in c. 600 CE, and by the end of the ninth century Arabic sources were describing it as a powerful agricultural and commercial kingdom. The Ghanaian kings eventually consolidated their power by monopolizing the trade in gold and salt; and by the eleventh century CE the Ghanaian military possessed an army of perhaps 200,000 chain-mail-wearing soldiers.²⁴

The American world zone

The existence of Ghanaian soldiers and Byzantine emperors, of Muslim caliphs and Hindu gods, and of Chinese emperors and Australian aboriginals was completely unknown to small fishing communities that occupied the Western Atlantic island environment known as the Caribbean. Ciboney peoples from the South American mainland had slowly settled the islands during the second millennium BCE, but by the end of the first millennium CE the more sophisticated Arawak culture had begun to displace them. These islands, and the vast continents of the nearby Americas, were so far isolated from events in Europe, Africa, and Asia by the broad Atlantic Ocean that they might as well have been on a different planet. Such had not always been the case, however. The ancestors of all the inhabitants of the Americas had originally come from Siberia and East Asia, crossing the Beringia land bridge that connected Russia and Alaska during the last ice age. The date of the

24 See Austen, "Trans-Saharan Trade," Chapter 24, this volume.

arrival of the first humans in the Americas is uncertain, but by at least 15,000 years ago humans had begun to occupy a wide range of environmental niches the length and breadth of the American world zone.

Within a thousand years of the great migration to the Americas, the last ice age began to wane. As the glacial sheets melted into the oceans, sea levels rose to cover the land bridge, trapping and isolating humans and other fauna and flora on the American continents (although some migrations from East Asia probably continued by canoe). With the exception of a brief foray by Norse peoples to the east coast of North America in the ninth and tenth centuries, the Americas remained completely isolated from the other world zones until the arrival of the Italian navigator Columbus in 1492. By then, cultural evolution in the American continents had created a range of vibrant and successful societies, each well adapted to its particular natural environment.

Daybreak upon the east coast of the South American continent diffused a dappled sunrise through the dense vegetation of the Amazon River Basin rain-forest. Here, semi-nomadic tribal peoples were going about their business of hunting, gathering, and fishing in one of the planet's richest biospheres. With no permanent records or architecture, historians can only conjecture about the lifeways of these people, although presumably little had changed by the arrival of the first Europeans around 1500 CE, who saw the natives as "noble savages" who nonetheless needed to be "civilized."

Across the Amazon Basin on the west coast of South America, agriculture had been practiced in the coastal regions and mountain highlands of modern-day Peru since perhaps 8000 BCE, and the gradual accumulation of surpluses had led to increased population densities and the creation of sedentary societies. The geography of the Central Andean region made communications challenging, which meant that it was more difficult for powerful rulers to establish unified state structures. Even so, by the early seventh century the Mochica culture was exerting a wide influence in northern Peru from its base in the Moche River Valley. The superb pottery of the Mochica offers us a glimpse at the everyday scenes that might have played out on any morning during that century. The ceramics depict everything from beggars on the streets to aristocrats hunting jaguar in the jungles, from women working in textile manufacturing to guards leading prisoners tied up with ropes. These images remind us that, although much has changed in the human condition in the centuries since c. 900 CE, many of the everyday experiences of humans have not.

In Central America to the north, humans had been farming since at least 4000 BCE. The principal domesticates were maize, tomatoes, beans, turkeys, and dogs. Successful agriculture led to towns and early states, and by 1000 BCE

the Olmec people had constructed elaborate ceremonial and palace complexes, and divided themselves into a rigidly stratified society dominated by priests and elites. Soon after 400 BCE Olmec culture declined rapidly, possibly as a result of significant environmental change. In the centuries that followed, a number of other cultures flourished at different locations across Mesoamerica. By c. 250 CE one of the most spectacular of these regional successors, the Maya, were firmly entrenched in city-states throughout modern Guatemala and parts of Mexico.

Mayan civilization reached its zenith during the seventh century CE. Through successful terraced agriculture, abundant maize and cacao harvests supported large populations, which gathered in dense concentrations at important ceremonial sites like Tikal and Chichen Itza. Particularly impressive was the bustling city of Tikal, which between 600 and 800 CE supported a population of perhaps 40,000. Mayan elite males were warriors, and conflict between city-states was ongoing. By the early ninth century, Maya society had fallen on hard times, a product perhaps of this endemic conflict, or environmental degradation, or both. The Maya religious myth, the *Popol Vuh*, claims that deities made humans out of maize and water, and that the gods would only keep the world going if they were propitiated by human sacrifice, with the blood of captured royal males and females of the enemy the most highly valued. Had any such ritual been played out toward the end of our volume's "day," sunset might have outlined the silhouettes of priests who had cut off the ends of the fingers of victims to ensure a copious flow of sacrificial blood.

In the highlands of Central Mexico, another complex Mesoamerican society flourished in the mid-first millennium CE, centered on the great city of Teotihuacan. Home to an astonishingly large population of perhaps 200,000 people by 600 CE, the inhabitants of Teotihuacan were responsible for constructing two of the most impressive monumental buildings in world architecture, the colossal pyramids of the sun and moon, which dominated the city skyline and remain just as impressive today as any of the monuments of Afro-Eurasia. Society in Teotihuacan was interconnected and stratified, with powerful rulers and priests, flourishing artisans, and perhaps two-thirds of the population engaged in farming. Before 500 CE there is little evidence of conflict in the region, but by the early seventh century Teotihuacan was under military pressure from surrounding peoples. Decline set in quickly, and in the eighth century Teotihuacan was sacked and burned.²⁵

25 See Begun and Brashler, "The Americas," Chapter 20, this volume.

Across the vast North American continent, a variety of political, cultural, and social traditions had emerged over the preceding millennia, so that by 1200 BCE it was difficult to describe any single cultural model. Fishing and the gathering of marine resources remained the norm along the coasts, but inland hunting of large animals like deer and bison offered a sustainable lifeway. Both fishing and hunting peoples supplemented their diets by gathering berries, nuts, root vegetables, and wild grasses, but as is the case with hunter-gatherer lifeways everywhere, limited food resources and the necessity for mobility resulted in small and diffused populations. In a few select regions of North America, however, more complex societies and larger population densities did begin to appear, based on sedentary agricultural practices.

East of the Mississippi River Valley woodland communities practiced horticulture, cultivating maize and beans. Archaeologists are able to trace continuous cultural developments amongst the woodland peoples from around 1000 BCE to 1000 CE, including evolving skills in woodworking, leatherworking, cultivation, shelter construction, and toolmaking. Sometime between 600 and 800 CE, the archaic spears of the Late Woodland Period were superseded by the bow and arrow, and semi-nomadic lifeways were replaced by permanent villages and dependence on farming, although the people never lost their skills of forest and large game herd management. The trend towards sedentism culminated in the emergence of large, state-like structures, including those of the Oscawa in 1000 CE, and the “nation” of the five Iroquois peoples (the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca) by c. 1400.²⁶

Forest dwelling tribes certainly knew how to use the naturally provided fruits of the woodland, but they also became skilled in manipulating the forests to their advantage. Archaeological evidence including charcoal deposits and pollen records, coupled with eyewitness accounts by early European settlers, has led to a revision of the view that the lifestyle of North American native peoples had little impact on the environment. It is now recognized that native peoples used fire extensively to clear land for planting corn, eliminating unwanted species like weeds while encouraging preferable species like blackberries and strawberries, and as a hunting technique. Grazing herds could be driven over cliffs by an accurate fire that took account of the prevailing winds, and many such “buffalo jumps” are known across North America. At the same time, fire could be used to keep grazing lands open and

26 See Begun and Brashler, “The Americas”, Chap. 20, this volume.

clear of other vegetation, which not only made hunting easier through enhanced visibility but also increased the size of herds. The notion that the native peoples of North America or Australia left no ecological footprint has now been replaced by a more realistic assessment of their environmental manipulation skills.

During the Woodland and later Mississippian eras, native peoples of eastern North America left their mark on the landscape in a different way, by erecting impressive earthen mounds. These structures are the largest examples of ancient monumental architecture in the Americas north of Mexico. Their function was varied. In some places the mounds took on the shape of an effigy of a culturally important animal, such as the Serpent Mound of Ohio. In other places the mounds served as burial structures, while others were platforms upon which ritual buildings or the dwellings of chiefs were erected. Construction of the most impressive mounds of all commenced at the very end of our era, at Cahokia near modern-day St. Louis. Between 900 and 1250 CE the Cahokia people constructed a complex of over a hundred large earthen mounds, and a sophisticated, interconnected society that astonished early European explorers.

Also late in the day for our volume, in the American Southwest Puebloan and Navajo peoples were practicing irrigation agriculture in their small fields of maize, beans, squash, and sunflowers. In the seventh century CE, the Pueblos began to construct surprisingly permanent solid stone and adobe structures. This process culminated in the construction of the great houses at Chaco Canyon, one of the most extraordinary archaeological sites in the world, which served as a major ceremonial, trade, and administration center for the region for four centuries between c. 850 and c. 1250 CE.²⁷

By c. 1200 BCE native peoples on the west coast of modern Canada had been pursuing hunting, foraging, and fishing lifeways for at least 8,000 years. Archaeologists have discovered toolkits of macro and micro blades that were used to arm hafted spears and knives. Cultural diffusion across the plains of North America ensured that technological innovations (including pottery and the bow and arrow), as well as cosmological beliefs, spread widely. There is also some evidence that during the period covered by this volume, socially ranked hierarchies emerged in Canadian native societies, leading to increased warfare between communities.

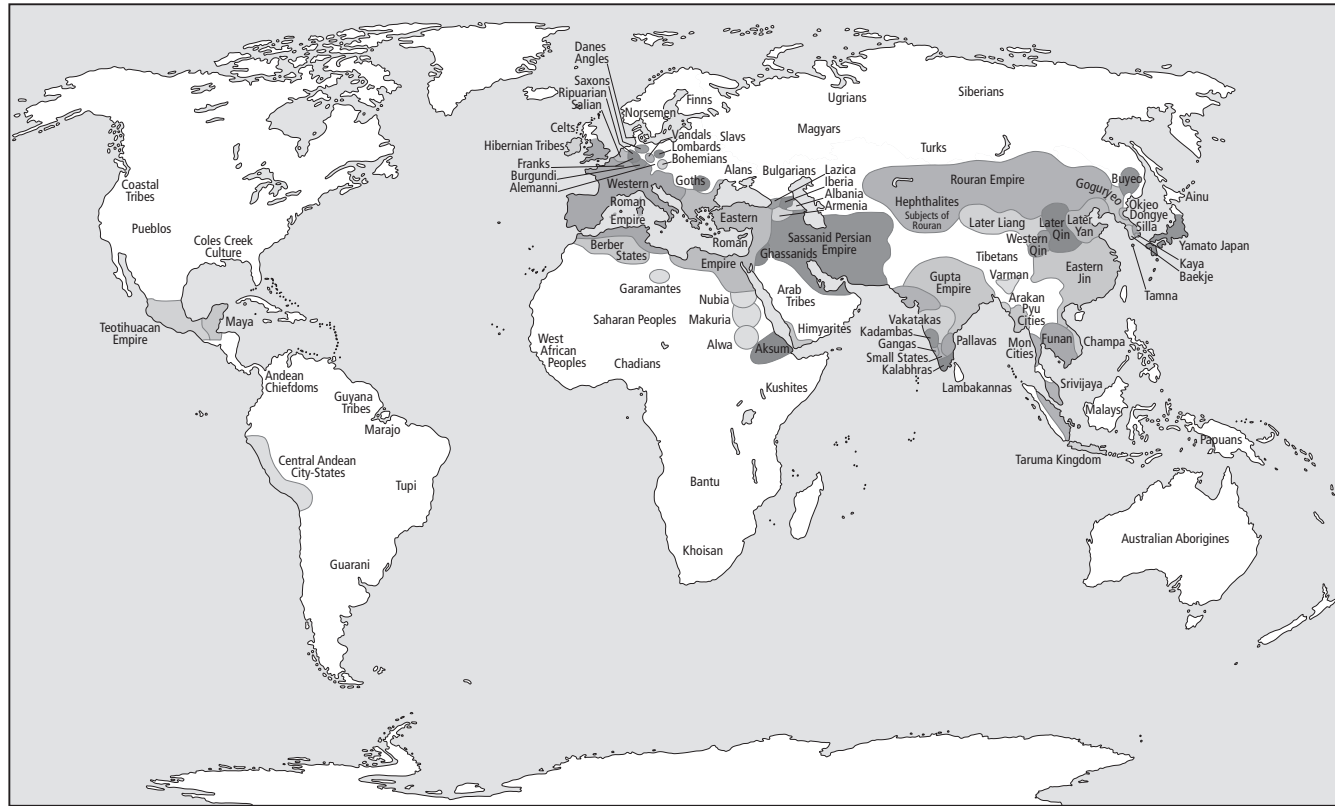
²⁷ See Lekson, "Regional Study: Chaco Culture and the US Southwest," Chapter 21, this volume.

To the frozen north of the Americas, finally, where Paleo-Eskimo fishermen and hunters would have enjoyed no warming sunlight on the first day of any of the 2,100 years between c. 1200 BCE and c. 900 CE, because the Arctic regions were and are in perpetual night during the long northern winter. In the darkness these hardy people awoke in their icehouses to feed on frozen seal or fish, warmed by the fires they kept burning through the winter. They worked to maintain their fur clothing, their canoes, and other sophisticated hunting and fishing equipment (made of stone, bone, tusk, and antlers), which collectively allowed these human communities to survive and prosper in regions where few other members of their species could endure. Some skilled individuals might have spent the winter carving naturalistic designs into ivory and antlers, creating sacred objects to be used in the shamanistic religious practices common to so many hunter-gatherer peoples around the globe.

As the earth spun towards the completion of its cycle, in our case an extended day of more than two millennia, sunlight slipped back out across the Pacific to that imaginary “date line” which marks the division between the end of one day and the beginning of the next. Humans had been greeting the dawn somewhere on the planet for more than 70 million mornings before our symbolic daybreak, ever since *Homo sapiens* had first emerged in Africa more than 200,000 years earlier. Even as night now descended upon this extraordinary diversity of human lifeways and experiences, the intricate processes of history continued their inexorable progress toward the dawn of another day, and an increasingly complex future.



Map 1.1 The world in 1 CE



Map 1.2 The world in 400 CE



Map 1.3 The world in 900 CE

PART I

*

GLOBAL HISTORIES

Global economic history

SITTA VON REDEN

Economics and empire

The world in this chapter refers to the Afro-Eurasian landmass from China and the islands of the Southeastern Pacific in the east to the Strait of Gibraltar in the west, the Baltic and North Sea coasts in the north, and the northern parts of Africa, Egypt, and down to ancient Ethiopia in the south. There were economic networks in the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa, too, but they remained unaffected by the interactions in the Afro-Eurasian world and will not be discussed here. This world between 1200 BCE and 900 CE saw the growth of large tributary empires, such as the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Mauryan, Chinese, Greek, and Roman, the latter expanding not only into Asia, Egypt, and North Africa but also into continental Europe. The period ends with the rise of Muslim power, which restructured the geopolitical order of the Afro-Eurasian zone. This chapter explores the effects of empire-building on both local economies and global connectivity, and the impact imperial expansion may have had on what one might call economic growth and complexity.

We have to be aware, however, of the narrative we give to the development. Some scholars attracted by world-systems analysis and later approaches to globalization have looked for the development of interregional trade, core-periphery hierarchies, and a clearly defined division of labor in a worldwide trade network. For such approaches the growth of economic connections is of prime importance, while the zones in which they developed are divided into different functional units.¹ However, such approaches underestimate a crucial

¹ Rondo Cameron and Larry Neal, *A Concise Economic History of the World* (Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 20–43; Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas D. Hall, *Rise and Demise: Comparing World Systems* (Boulder, CO: Westview 1977), pp. 149–87; R. M. Geraghty, “The Impact of Globalization in the Roman Empire, 200 BC – AD 100,” *Journal of Economic History* 67 (2007): 1036–61; and Matthew P. Fitzpatrick,

difference between pre-modern and modern world economies. In ancient societies long-distance trade responded to the desires and interests of only very small, if highly visible, social groups. Arguably, the aggregate value of their demand was massive, but never was local production, and politics, oriented toward a world market so as to lay foundations for a culturally or economically homogeneous space. We do not need to argue that pre-modern economies were fully locked in local politics and social structures. But it is equally misleading to attribute to ancient imperial expansion a logic that became important in later periods only.² In order to explain that very thin veneer of cross-cultural trade, we need to investigate, first of all, the structures that generated such trade. We may then proceed to its nature and directions.

Nor can we assume linear or lateral economic progress within this period. Empires were at different times conducive or disruptive to economic development, though in general the political and economic integration they fostered can be regarded as positive for their economies.³ In the long run, the world from 1200 BCE to 900 CE developed considerably, possibly at estimated growth rates in the range of up to 0.1 percent per year. Yet it was a world of vast inequalities. This does not refer just to inequality of wealth and standards of living but also to the extent to which individuals and communities participated in economic and technological progress. The processes that we can identify as increasing productivity and market development took place at some levels of empire and not at others; empires formed without all regions in their territory being affected by it, or at the same pace. Social, political, and economic networks could be formed by small numbers of participants and for a very limited range of consumers. Monetization, market formation, and inter-regional exchange were never complete and socially encompassing. Here is another crucial difference between ancient and modern world economics: the structural inequality of economic opportunities that is built into agrarian societies led to deeply hybrid economies in which different economic practices not only coexisted, but were combined in surprising ways.

We finally need to allow for shifting agents in the narrative of development. The Neo-Assyrian Empire of the first quarter of the first millennium

"Provincializing Rome: The Indian Ocean Trade Network and Roman Imperialism," *Journal of World History* 22 (2011): 27–54.

² Greg Woolf, "World Systems Analysis and the Roman Empire," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 3 (1990): 44–58.

³ Peter R. Bedford, "The Persian Near East," in Walter Scheidel, Ian Morris, and Richard P. Saller (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 310.

BCE was a different political formation from the Chinese and Roman empires 700 years later. The Assyrian Empire was a royal family at the top of relatively strong local aristocracies and temple elites who were tied to the king by ritual and the obligation to render gifts in precious metal or in kind. The wealth and level of consumption of the royal palaces at Niniveh and Nimrud depended on the wealth and productive capacity of the regions from which gift-tribute was gathered, and on the interregional exchange networks local aristocracies maintained in order to serve the interdependent needs of themselves and the dominating kings. Both trade and taxation in the Roman Empire, by contrast, involved a broader social base, and the consumption regimes of aristocracies and emperors began to play a less exclusive part in the nature of exchange. While the tastes and preferences of provincial elites and emperors remained important, a broader range of consumption groups, cities, markets, and the interests of an increasingly professional group of merchants and financiers became important engines in the commercial process. In imperial China, following a different path, bureaucratic and family networks mobilized goods for reasons other than imperial consumption. There was competition within and between such networks, and they became, up to a degree, quite independent from the imperial center. Looking at agents in the global economy, we thus gradually need to introduce bottom-up dynamics into the top-down model of economic history over 2,000 years.

Our account starts from consumption. All ancient empires rested on three pillars: military power, self-representation, and taxation. This meant in practice control over people, their labor power, their mobility and surplus production, land and transportation routes, as well as influence on institutions and technology that allowed the effective exploitation of resources and collection of taxes. Economic development, moreover, went along with increasing social complexity, that is, the increasing attempt of elites and aristocracies to compete against each other by distinguishing themselves through differentiated consumption.⁴ The world of Afro-Eurasian antiquity was a world dominated by agriculture and agrarian households who lived at, or just comfortably above, subsistence level. The vast majority of the population was involved in growing food, providing shelter and clothing for themselves, as well as producing the paraphernalia for local social and cultic events. Up to 80 percent of the world population, it is estimated, was actively occupied in the agrarian sector before modernization; an unknown but certainly by far the largest proportion of that percentage spent their surplus

4 Neville Morley, *Trade in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 34–54.

less for their own benefit than for the purpose of paying rents, taxes, or tribute to those concentrating resources for military campaigns and social distinction in towns and courts. It is highly controversial to what extent per-capita productivity increased during prosperous phases of imperial stability, but the increase of aggregate consumption measurable in the growth of armies, cities, cult, infrastructure, and monetized exchange is beyond doubt. How can we account for that growth?

This chapter is subdivided into four sections: the first section deals with agriculture and its development under imperial conditions; the second with monetization; the third considers the impact of governance structures and taxation on ancient economies, while in the final section I shall turn to the growing connection of the world in the four centuries either side of the Common Era divide.

Agriculture under imperial conditions

The world outlined above encompassed several ecological zones, which affected local economic behavior and performance.⁵ Sedentary agriculture dominated over nomadic and semi-nomadic cultures, but was not suitable to all soils, nor was it everywhere equally productive. In the fertile alluvial plains of the large river valleys – the Yellow River in northeastern China, the Euphrates in Southern Mesopotamia/Babylonia, and the Nile in Egypt – cereal agriculture was very productive and could reach, with adequate irrigation and flood control, yield ratios of 1:10 to 1:24. Most territories in which rain-fed cereal agriculture was practiced were less fertile, such as Northern Mesopotamia, all regions around the Mediterranean except Egypt, and continental Europe. Here yield ratios between a minimum of 1:4 and maximum of 1:10 are recorded, though here, too, productivity was enhanced in time through artificial irrigation and drainage.⁶ In highly fertile southern China, below the ecological border of the Yangtze River, Japan, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent, rice was the staple crop producing much higher yields than cereals per ha, but also requiring more intensive

5 Useful mapping of ecology and resource endowments, though slightly out of date, can be found in Christopher Scarre (ed.), *Past Worlds: The Times Atlas of Archaeology* (London: Times Books, 1988).

6 R. J. van der Spek, "The Hellenistic Near East," in Scheidel *et al.* (eds.), *Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*, pp. 409–34, for Babylonia; Geoffrey Kron, "Sustainable Roman Intensive Farming Methods: Water Conservation and Erosion Control," in Robert Bedon and Ella Hermon (eds.), *Concepts, Pratiques et Enjeux Environnementaux dans l'Empire Romaine* (Presses Universitaires de Limoges, 2005), pp. 285–308; and Geoffrey Kron, "Food Production," in Walter Scheidel (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 156–74, for Roman Italy.

care. In Central Asia, a vast belt of grassland steppe, broken up by deserts and mountains, stretches from the Manchurian plains in the east to European Russia in the west and is fringed in the north by forests and in the south by mountain ranges and arid zones. Given the scarcity of rainfall and intense climatic variation from winter cold to summer heat, agriculture is limited here, and people relied more heavily on animals than on the cultivation of plants. Some areas were endowed with particular local products of interregional importance. The Red Sea kingdoms flourished on the trade in frankincense and myrrh, which grow naturally in southern Arabia and the region of ancient Ethiopia (modern Somalia). Fortunate, moreover, were regions with natural mining resources, such as Spain, Attica, Anatolia, and the Arvalli region in northwestern India for silver, or Nubia, the eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula, Maski in Karnataka (India), and places in the Ural-Altai region, including locations bordering Northern China, for gold. Copper and tin resources had endowed some areas with centrality in the late second and early first millennia, such as the region of the Upper Yellow River between the loess plateau and Henan under Shang, or Cyprus in the Eastern Aegean during the Aegean Bronze Age. Yet despite the vital importance of these resources for the power and prestige of elites in the East and West, these regions did not become centers of power themselves. Some tribal kingdoms grew rich on the trade of their much-in-demand resources, but individually they never translated their possession of an exclusive product into political dominance.⁷

Politically more powerful were agrarian states that gained control over agrarian and social resources across ecological zones. The best example is the Near Eastern region, controlled successively by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Seleucids (successor dynasty of Alexander III “the Great”) between the eighth and the middle of the second centuries B.C.E.⁸ The Neo-Assyrian Empire comprised the territory of Southern and Northern Mesopotamia, northern Syria, the Levant, and the south Syrian desert and steppe region, while under the Persians, Asia Minor and Egypt were also included. During the Neo-Assyrian period significant numbers of people were shifted into Northern Mesopotamia. A sizable proportion of urban

7 Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 3–51; by contrast, Chase-Dunn and Hall, *Rise and Demise*, pp. 168–73.

8 Michael Jursa, *Aspects of the Economic History of Babylonia in the First Millennium: Economic Geography, Economic Mentalities, Agriculture and the Problem of Economic Growth* (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2010); Bedford, “The Persian Near East”; and van der Spek, “The Hellenistic Near East,” pp. 409–34.

residents of Syria-Palestine, urban Babylonians, Arameans, and Chaldeans were deported from their homeland, settled in new cities, and put to agricultural work in underdeveloped areas. Resettlement was not an economic scheme, but aimed at punishing recalcitrant vassals and pacifying their territories, as the Assyrian royal annals have it. Yet by the time of the Persian period there was a clear economic outcome of the policy of deportation: a marked increase in the amount of land under cultivation in Northern Mesopotamia with a resulting increase in agricultural production in that region.⁹ Partly because of the highly productive irrigated landscapes in Southern Mesopotamia and Egypt, the Near Eastern empires created wealth in an order of magnitude unknown to the Western world down to the Roman imperial period when Gallia, for example, to judge from its tribute, became just as productive as Egypt. Another asset was their power to administratively and socially reorganize and pacify a vast ecological space.

Agrarian organization

Both peasant and intensive agriculture were based on mixed farming. Different staples were grown in different ecological zones: millet in Northern China, rice in Southern China and India; barley in Mesopotamia; emmer in Egypt, durum wheat in the Mediterranean, and bread wheat in the Black Sea region. They were combined with secondary cereals, oil and fodder crops, legumes, dates, vines, and indeed any other cultivated plant that the area had to offer. Animal husbandry supplemented agriculture for milk products and, to a lesser extent, meat, while manure was essential for fertilizing.¹⁰ Mixed cultivation not only served a mixed diet and a sustainable agricultural base, but was also an economic strategy of risk aversion. Cereal crops need an absolute minimum of 250 to 300 mm of annual precipitation and no frost during the growing season; conditions that are impaired at regular intervals, though often just locally, in many of the climatic regions where cereal agriculture was practiced. Equally adverse were insufficient inundation or flooding in river zones, which in more centralized régimes like China, Babylonia, and Egypt could lead to catastrophic consequences for local agriculture, and political instability. Monoculture was no option anywhere in the ancient world. This does not mean that market-oriented production did not lead to specialization in certain cash crops. But none of

⁹ Bedford, "The Persian Near East," p. 308; and van der Spek, "The Hellenistic Near East," pp. 409–34.

¹⁰ Kron, "Food Production," pp. 156–74.

even the most commercially minded agrarian manuals of the Roman and Chinese imperial periods recommends putting everything on one card.

Agriculture was organized within three broad categories of property relationship. The most widespread one was tenancy and share-cropping. In such labor relationships cultivators work, either individually or collectively, land held by agrarian aristocracies or institutions (temples, kings, and high royal officials). Tenancy is usually the term for contractual relationships where fixed rental periods and obligations are specified; whereas share-cropping refers to dependent labor relationships where landlord and cultivator share the harvest in (unequal) parts, and the cultivator's freedom is encumbered to a greater or lesser extent.¹¹ These types of semi-free relationships, where rents are more oppressing than taxes, are typical of periods of weak central power systems through which many African, Asian, and European empires went between 1200 BCE and 900 CE. However, they must be regarded as a wide spectrum of dependent or semi-dependent agrarian labor relationships, rather than a timeless institution.

The second category was peasant agriculture where landowners cultivate their property together with their nuclear families and possibly one or two slaves. This type of land holding is most typically found in the core regions of the Greco-Roman Mediterranean. Another type of this category developed in empires with predominantly institutional landownership. Here, too, peasant landholding developed, as smaller and greater landholders – *de iure* tenants of institutional land – gained broader property rights as a result of hereditary bequest, gift, or purchase.¹² In this type of free-holding, rents formally paid to institutional landlords were gradually transformed into taxes. Such kinds of transformation processes can be observed in different ways in some regions of China, Babylonia, and Egypt at different times between 600 BCE and the first century CE.¹³

¹¹ Thrainn Eggertsson, *Economic Behaviour and Institutions* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), for discussion of these principles; Christopher Wickham "Rethinking the Structure of the Early Medieval Economy," in Jennifer R. Davis and M. McCormick (eds.), *The Long Morning of Medieval Europe* (Aldershot: Scholars Press, 2008), pp. 19–31, for discussion in historical context.

¹² Joseph G. Manning, *Land and Power in Ptolemaic Egypt: The Structure of Land Tenure* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Andrew Monson, *From the Ptolemies to the Romans: Political and Economic Change in Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), for the transition in Greco-Roman Egypt. Nishijima Sadao, "Economic and Social History of Former Han," in Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (eds.), *Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 556, for China.

¹³ Sadao, "Economic and Social History," pp. 545–60; Christopher J. Eyre, "Feudal Tenure and Absentee Landlords," in Schafik Allam (ed.), *Grund und Boden in Altägypten. Akten des*

The third mode of production, equally diverse in its social manifestation over time and space, was slave labor, which is attested in all societies considered here. Affluent to average peasant households in Northern China and India, Egypt, North Africa, and Europe held one or two slaves to help with agrarian labor and/or household tasks. Large numbers of slaves were also employed in high-risk occupations such as quarrying, mining, and building work. They frequently worked side by side with *corvée* laborers and prisoners, while household slaves rubbed shoulders with seasonal employees, and could be hired out for a wage as well. Slavery was built into the socio-economic system of ancient agrarian states. But only under the Roman Empire did slave employment turn into a strategy of market-oriented agrarian enterprise. Roman villa estates were typically both run by a qualified slave manager (*vilicus*) and cultivated by large numbers of chattel slaves.¹⁴

Agrarian development

Stable empires created favorable conditions for the development of agriculture, despite the agricultural and demographic destruction they caused locally through military invasion, raiding, and mass enslavement. Some development was the result of direct interference into social and geographic landscapes, such as settlement politics, development of agricultural and hydrological infrastructure, and the promotion of technological knowledge. Others were more indirect: peace and protection, transformation of exchange networks, or investment opportunities through imperial conquest and exploitation. Conquest, moreover, provided new settlement space, gave opportunity for tax reforms, and mobilized local knowledge. In the limited space of this chapter, I confine myself to two of these aspects.

Settlement politics

Sadao identifies two crucial economic processes in the making of imperial China: the breaking up of clan-based agriculture in Northern China under the Warring States and their replacement by family farms organized in small hierarchical communities (*li*) supervised by powerful patriarchs (the predecessors of Han bureaucratic administrators); and the investment by these

internationalen Symposiums in Tübingen 18–20. Juni 1990 (Tübingen: Selbstverlag, 1994), pp. 107–33; Johannes M. Renger, Institutional, Communal and Individual Ownership or Possession of Arable Land in Ancient Mesopotamia from the End of the Fourth to the End of the First Millennium BC,” *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 71 (1995): 269–319; van der Spek, “The Hellenistic Near East,” pp. 409–34.

¹⁴ Walter Scheidel, “Slavery,” in Scheidel (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy*, pp. 89–113, for recent discussion of the stability of the Roman slave system.

local patriarchs into new techniques of water control and thus the development of new agrarian space. The interrelated process of opening up new land and formation of new communities continued under Qin. One example is the Zhengdu basin, carried out by Li Peng, governor of Shu. Another is the Cheng Guo Canal, promoted by the king of Qin and named after his engineer, Cheng Guo of the state of Han. This canal irrigated the plain north of the Wei River in Shensi and opened up some 40,000 *ching* or 1821 km². Han continued to promote flood control and irrigation works in many other regions, some projects extending again to as much as 10,000 *ching* (c. 457 km²). By financing flood control and irrigation, and maintaining the bureaucracy to implement the projects, the dynasty benefited through taxation and power, but it also fostered agrarian development and social prosperity. Agrarian development continued throughout Early Han and greatly increased under Later Han.¹⁵

Similar projects of water control and resettlement are attested in other imperial contexts. Jursa describes the period of intensive canal building attested in northern Babylonia around Sippar in the early sixth century BCE. This gave rise to the rapid transformation of the agrarian base of northern Babylonia under Chaldean rule during which rural properties underwent fundamental change, leading to an increase in productivity, economic growth, and the development of a more thoroughly monetized economy in Babylonia. Of perhaps lesser impact, but noteworthy, too, was the development of the Fayyum oasis southeast of Memphis under the Ptolemies during the early third century BCE. By lowering the water level of Lake Moeris, they trebled the cultivable area from 450 to around 1200 km².¹⁶ The development of the Fayyum served to settle Greek military and civil immigrants, was a project of prestige and cultural competition, and simultaneously created a fertile hinterland for the new capital of Alexandria.

Of broader economic consequence was the policy of the Roman government to settle veterans and found colonies on newly conquered Roman territory. Uncultivated land was marked out in squares and rectangles by means of boundaries or drainage ditches (a process called centuriation). During the early period of Roman conquest, it transformed the face of Roman Italy, Gaul, North Africa, and Spain where traces are still visible today. The state's

15 Sadao, "Economic and Social History," pp. 553–55.

16 Jursa, *Aspects of the Economic History of Babylonia*, pp. 322–60 and 786; Manning, *Land and Power*, pp. 99–107. R. J. van der Spek, "The Seleucid State and the Economy," in E. Lo Cascio and D. Rathbone (eds.), *Production and Public Powers in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge Philological Society, 2000), pp. 27–36, for similar, though less extensive, initiatives in Mesopotamia under Antiochos III.

organization and mobilization of the collective labor force of the rural population for these projects were immense. Drainage was particularly important in low-lying clay soils, or in rich river valleys, such as the Pomptine marshes in central Italy or the Po Valley, the latter transforming into Italy's richest agricultural region, in large parts through the land reclamation initiative of a single Roman senator.¹⁷ It might not be accidental that the same senator was also responsible for the grain supply of the city of Rome in 109 BCE.

Land and investment

The Han and Roman empires represent very different agro-political systems, the one centered on some form of institutional ownership of land, a strong state, and bureaucracy, the other on more extensive private property rights over land, relatively weak central government, and decentralized forms of administration.¹⁸ But in both cases the narrative of land concentration and agrarian production for markets at the height of economic power converge.

Land concentration was probably well under way in pre-imperial China but took off under Han in connection with a series of floods and droughts combined with a fierce taxation regime.¹⁹ Poorer peasants were forced to sell their land, houses, and even children as a consequence of poverty and debt. So-called drifting peasants were employed as landless tenants in share-cropping arrangements. Despite repeated attempts by the state to forestall land concentration, large networks of landholding became accepted as a matter of course. Toward the end of the reign of Wudi (140–87 BCE), a new and improved system of cultivation greatly increased agricultural productivity.²⁰ It can best be understood as a form of integrated fallow: straight furrows were sown with seeds alternating with ridges that lay fallow on the same field and were reversed the next year. The accompanying invention of an improved plow with two shares and drawn by a pair of oxen led to more efficient sowing and could lead to

17 Kron, "Food Production," pp. 166–67.

18 For comparative perspectives, see Walter Scheidel, "From the Great Convergence to the Great Divergence: Roman and Qin-Han State Formation and Its Aftermath," in Scheidel (ed.), *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empires*, Oxford Studies in Early Empires, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 11–23; P. Eich, "The Common Denominator: Late Roman Imperial Bureaucracy from a Comparative Viewpoint," in Walter Scheidel (ed.), *State Power and Social Control in Ancient China and Rome* (forthcoming); for China, Mark Edward Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 18; for Babylonia, Jursa, *Aspects of the Economic History*, pp. 437–62; for late antique and early medieval Europe, Peter Sarris, *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

19 Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires*, 66.

20 Sadao, "Economic and Social History," pp. 561–65; Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires*, pp. 103–105.

double yields in cases of good management. The system was introduced on state-owned land and soon adopted on large private estates; but it met with problems among poorer peasants as it required more elaborate equipment, more animals, and above all more intensive care that could not be performed on family farms. Wealthy farmers also profited from improved irrigation through brick-lined wells, which could be dug more deeply. Irrigation in the North China Plain relied on water from such wells, so better wells compensated for insufficient rainfall, and thus were conducive to increased productivity.

By the time of Later Han, we hear of great families who combined social power with landowning and trade. The network of holdings these families dominated was vast. Fan Chung (c. 20 BCE – 20 CE) held 300 *ching* (c. 1375 ha); Yin Shih in the beginning of the first century CE owned 700 *ching* (c. 3237 ha) and was able to mobilize a thousand men to fight in the civil war. Average individual holdings may have had the size of 2.8 to 3.2 ha, and someone who owned ten times the average could be regarded as affluent. It is important to note, however, that the reason for land concentration was influenced by an ideology of patronage, social control, and local power, rather than economic intensification.²¹

Key to Roman land concentration was imperial conquest, the boom in demand for agrarian produce to supply the long-serving armies, the availability of slave labor, and the spread of wine consumption in the Roman Empire. The conquest and administration of provinces, above all Sicily, Spain, and the economically developed regions of the Eastern Mediterranean, created unprecedented monetary revenue for the Roman senatorial elite and familiarized them with the sophisticated monetary economy of the Eastern Mediterranean Hellenistic world. In addition, they came into contact with Hellenistic agricultural knowledge laid down in an extensive agronomic literature traveling to Rome via Athens, Alexandria, Cyrene, and Carthage. Land concentration of agrarian property in Italy is attested both archaeologically and in Late Republican political discourses when the call for land-distribution schemes due to the impoverishment of the peasantry played an important role in the debates of the declining state. Archaeologically, the well-organized agrarian *villa* system seems to have begun to transform the Italian landscape from the second century BCE onwards. Settefenestre near Cosa is the best-known example, but there were many others, concentrating mostly in Campania in

21 Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires*, p. 115; Patricia Ebrey, "The Economic and Social History of Later Han," in Twitchett and Loewe (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, p. 624.

southwestern Italy, and the Po Valley. Roman senators expanded their holdings in Italy but also acquired land in the provinces. By the end of the Republic, the senator Marcus Licinius Crassus was said to have 200 million sesterces in land, which may be calculated into the value of roughly 500 km² of arable land.²² *Villae* of 25 to 75 ha seem to have been medium sized, while the average peasant farmstead measured just one tenth of that. So-called *latifundia* developed in Italy and Sicily in the course of the first century CE and were an amalgamation of such mid-sized estates. These could grow to a size of 1000–2000 ha, comparable to royal or temple holdings in Egypt and the Near East.

But management principles mattered much more than individual size in determining the nature of the *villa* system. Typical were a large proportion of unfree labor in the productive force, intensive, year-round cultivation, technological and agricultural experimentation, including fertilization and irrigation, and the systematic production of cash crops, above all oil and wine, for local and interregional markets. The agronomist Columella (first century CE) offered expert advice on the running of such estates and provides an idea of the sophistication of agricultural practice. The *villa* system spread to Africa, Gaul, and Germany where large estates with much equipment for oil and wine production sufficient to supply interregional markets are attested.²³ Also the proprietors of estates gradually became a more diverse social group. By the late first century BCE, a Roman freedman C. Caecilius Isidorus owned a fortune that could easily rival those of more long-standing social background (though his case may be exceptional).²⁴ We are unable to quantify the output of these large estates, but they provide the backdrop for the scale of commodity circulation in the Roman Empire.

Monetization

The use of limited-purpose money in some spheres of exchange preceded all monetary systems of the Afro-Eurasian world of the mid-first millennium and helps to explain monetization as a path-dependent process. Cowries dominated the Far Eastern aristocratic exchange network between China, the Southeastern Pacific, and India; precious metal bullion was a typical means of payment and exchange in Western Eurasia and Egypt. Local currencies with

22 William V. Harris, "The Late Republic," in Scheidel *et al.* (eds.), *Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*, pp. 511–42; p. 524 on Crassus.

23 Dennis P. Kehoe, "The Early Roman Empire: Production," in Scheidel *et al.* (eds.), *Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*, p. 556, with further literature.

24 Harris, "The Late Republic," p. 524.

which rents were paid, tribute collected, diplomacy conducted, and sacred obligations fulfilled included grain, silk, and other textiles, jade discs, bronze bars, precious metal objects and base metal utensils, pearls, and glass ware.²⁵ An important step in the history of monetization is the exchange of objects according to fixed units, which requires a degree of central authority over exchange. The first systems in which such centralized control over monetary units is attested are Mesopotamia and Egypt in the third millennium B.C.E.²⁶ From the second quarter of the first millennium, however, we find many more such cases increasing in tandem with growing political organization in Asia, Egypt, and the city-states of Greece and Italy. While state formation was a vital precondition for monetary exchange, imperial expansion was not. Imperial governments and the administrations did not, or could not, enforce their currency across political boundaries, though monetary systems consolidated under imperial conditions due to tribute payments, paid military service, and the symbolic benefits which accrue from using a powerful currency. Precious metal proved the most accepted monetary medium in the long term, because of its durability, portability, divisibility, and relatively stable value within and across political boundaries.

Cash and coinage

We have to distinguish between two cash traditions. The one developed coinage and very rapidly replaced other monetary media by it. This is represented, at least in the case of bronze coinage, by China, as well as by India and the Greek world, which also had a strong impact on later Greco-Bactrian, Kushan, and Parthian coin use. Within the other cash tradition, the use of uncoined precious metal had a long tradition, and was maintained longer after contacts with coinage. This was the case in the Near Eastern empires and Egypt. But also within the coin tradition, bullion remained part of the monetary economy after the introduction of coinage. In China gold was very rarely minted into coins despite forming part of a bimetallic monetary system. In the Greco-Roman world, unsurprisingly, gold and silver bullion continued to be

25 Jursa, *Aspects of the Economic History*, pp. 469 and 750; Walter Scheidel, "The Monetary Systems of the Han and Roman Empires," in Scheidel (ed.), *Rome and China*, p. 139, for China; Andrew Burnett, *Coinage in the Roman World* (London: Seaby, 1987), pp. 1–17, for Rome; John H. Kroll, "The Monetary Use of Weighed Bullion in Archaic Greece," in William V. Harris (ed.), *The Monetary System of the Greeks and Romans* (Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 12–37, for Greece; David M. Schaps, "The Invention of Coinage in Lydia, in India and in China," *Bulletin du Cercle d'Études Numismatiques* 44 (2007): 281–322, in comparative perspective.

26 Jonathan Williams (ed.) *Money: A History* (London: The British Museum Press, 1997), pp. 16–24.

used as a store of value, and for the transfer of large sums.²⁷ The trend toward greater monetization and greater financial sophistication – including financial intermediation and credit finance – can be observed in both cash traditions, and there is no intrinsic economic advantage in either of them.

Coinage developed in imperial China in the fourth century BCE and came to be used in all Chinese states according to local weight standards, except the southern state of Chou where cowry shells and inscribed gold plates formed an isolated monetary development. Characteristic of the Chinese coin tradition is the use of base metal, a punch-whole in the centre of the coin, and frequently an inscription of value or issuing authority. Gold remained uncoined but became part of a bimetallic monetary system. A further important idiosyncrasy of Chinese coinage was the lack, or incapacity, of state control over private coining.²⁸

The beginnings of coinage in the Indian subcontinent lie much in the dark, but the assumption that it developed in contact with Alexander the Great rests on no more than cultural prejudice. The first Indian coins originate in the Indo-Gangetic plain during the sixth century BCE, long before Indian contacts with Greeks. They were minted, punch-marked silver pieces cut to weight, which coincides neither with Chinese nor Greek technology. Punch-marked coins are found throughout India, but most types were more or less restricted geographically. It has been argued that they were a means of exchange among tribal states that had formed in the Indian subcontinent in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. Other issues were distributed more widely, which may either represent the new coinage of the Nanda and Maurya dynasties, which united most of India in the late fourth and early third centuries BCE, or represent local issues that circulated across political borders from that time onwards.²⁹

The Greek coin tradition is the oldest and best documented of the three. It was preceded for at least one century by silver bullion used according to fixed units of weight. The first coins were minted in Greco-Lyidian cities on the coast of Asia Minor during the late seventh century BCE. They were struck in a local alloy of gold and silver, called *electron*, which occurs naturally on Mount Tmolos and the River Paktolos in Lydia. The idea to coin precious

27 Scheidel, "From the Great Convergence," pp. 11–23, for gold use in China; William V. Harris, "The Nature of Roman Money," in Harris (ed.), *Monetary Systems*, pp. 174–207, for the use of bullion in the advanced Greco-Roman economy.

28 Walter Scheidel, "Divergent Evolution of Coinage in Eastern and Western Eurasia," in Harris (ed.), *Monetary Systems*, pp. 267–86; Scheidel, "Monetary Systems," pp. 137–208; for illustrations, Williams (ed.), *Money*.

29 Schaps, "The Invention of Coinage," 290–92, with further bibliography.

metal spread into major cities of the Aegean, such as Aegina, Corinth, Athens, and some Ionian and Cycladic communities. Greek coins outside Lydia were struck in silver according to local weight systems and bearing local emblems of civic identity. Very rapidly coinage was adopted by many cities in the Black Sea region, Cyrene, Sicily, Spain, southern France, and Italy where Greeks had settled and maintained intense ties with mainland Greece. Bronze and gold coins do not appear before the fourth century BCE.³⁰

The coinage of the city of Athens became dominant in the fifth century BCE due to the Athenian Empire and the financial demands of the federal fleet. It spread far beyond the boundaries of the Greek-speaking world in the late fifth and fourth centuries BCE as a result of being the most accepted currency by mercenaries and traders everywhere. Imitations of Athenian coins are found in Egypt, Syria, and Arabia where the local use of “Athenian” coinage filled different purposes. On the Arabian Peninsula, for example, Greek coins spurred local monetization from the fourth century BCE onwards, particularly in the corridor running from Gaza to the South Arabian kingdoms.³¹ Coinages of other Greek cities were adopted outside their boundaries, too.³² Carthage in northern Africa adopted coinage via Sicily in the fourth century BCE; Rome via Neapolis in southern Italy during the third; the Celts were introduced to coinage via Macedonia and the Greek towns on the Franco-Iberian coast in the late fourth century BCE. Coin use was stimulated by the expansion of Greek culture under Alexander the Great and the ensuing Greek administration of the formerly Persian Empire. Full monetary consolidation, that is, a single imperial currency, supplemented by subsidiary local issues, developed in the Mediterranean under the Roman Empire from the second century BCE onwards.³³

The use of metal money was dependent on local metal resources. Many monetary societies, however, had to rely on conquest or exchange. Highly monetized empires, most notably Babylonia, did not have access to local mines, but their monetary economies flourished as long as silver or coin

30 John H. Kroll, “Observations on Monetary Instruments in Pre-Coinage Greece,” in Miriam S. Balmuth (ed.), *Hacksilber to Coinage: New Insights into the Monetary History of the Near East and Greece* (New York: American Numismatic Society, 2001), pp. 77–92; David M. Schaps, *The Invention of Coinage and the Monetization of Ancient Greece* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), pp. 93–111; Sitta von Reden, *Money in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 30–33.

31 Peter G. van Aalfen, “Mechanisms for the Imitation of Athenian Coinage: Dekeleia and Mercenaries Reconsidered,” *Review Belge de Numismatique et de Sigillographie* 157 (2011): 79–83.

32 Von Reden, *Money in Classical Antiquity*, pp. 35–64.

33 Andrew Burnett, *Coinage in the Roman World* (London: Seaby, 1987), p. 37; Scheidel, “Divergent Evolution of Coinage,” p. 271.

supply was guaranteed by sufficient accumulation. The enormous silver wealth of Babylonia in and after the Achaemenid period is supposed to have been made possible first through gifts, tribute, and predation, but increasingly through commercial trade.³⁴ Economies with a high agrarian resource endowment potentially could benefit from a positive balance of trade, especially when local agricultural productivity was increased by efficient agrarian management. But, arguably, the ideological emphasis on agriculture as the only source of real wealth, and the symbolic benefits attributed to spending, rather than receiving, money, prohibited ancient societies from developing export to its full mercantile potential. Complaints about the drainage of money surfaced only when it was linked to expenditure on luxuries, as Roman literature throughout the imperial period makes abundantly clear. But a more serious challenge to imperial stability was the loss of money through military overspending. This raises the question of the role of states and imperial governance in ancient economies.

Taxation, trade, and urban development

Taxation was one of the most important means of asserting and maintaining empire both financially and symbolically. City-states, even if they were bound into larger imperial structures, refrained from taxing their citizens but asserted their sovereignty by taxing foreigners, merchants, and imports instead. Kingdoms and empires taxed their subjects, but tended to exempt privileged communities and classes of subjects. Most typical of ancient taxation was a combination of capitation, land or harvest taxes, property taxes, and a large number of indirect imposts on shipping, manufacturing, marketing, land sales, animal husbandry, fishing, use of public services, and so on. It was normally the sum of small amounts rather than the volume of an individual tax that made up the balance of a tax district. Taxes were used for local purposes (infrastructure and military installments) as much as they were sent to the centers of power and frontier zones. It is uncontroversial that they were the most important means of maintaining the costs of campaigns and armies.³⁵ Any other costs were secondary to this expenditure in the imperial budget.

34 Michael Jursa, "Grundzüge der Wirtschaftsform Babyloniens im ersten Jahrtausend v. Chr.," in Robert Rollinger and Christoph Ulf (eds.), *Commerce and Monetary Systems in the Ancient World: Means of Transmission and Cultural Interaction* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 2004), pp. 115–36.

35 Keith Hopkins, "Taxes and Trade in the Roman Empire (200 BC – AD 400)," *Journal of Roman Studies* 70 (1980): 101–25; E. Lo Cascio, "The Early Roman Empire," in Scheidel et al. (eds.), *Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*, pp. 619–50.

It should be noted, moreover, that the income generated was only one of the functions of imperial taxation; another was exercise of social control. For the assessment of poll and land taxes, tax subjects, land, or yields had to be registered; age groups, gender, ethnic origin, citizen status and faith were demarcated by differential assessment. Privileged groups and communities could be favored by reduced taxes, and unwanted professions, such as merchants under Han, imposed a double rate. Tax incentives could be created for special purposes, such as the introduction of a new crop, or the increase of children. There was also a close connection between taxation and the physical control of people. Both in China and in Egypt there was an extensive system of forced labor to which, in principle, everyone was liable. Yet *corvée* could be avoided against payment of tax, showing the convertibility of the state's control over surplus and bodies.³⁶ Given such additional functions of taxation, it is doubtful that tax levies were calculated strictly on budgetary needs.

Fiscal politics, however, had the most profound impact on ancient economies. Given the agrarian base of most tax subjects, rents and land taxes were most naturally levied in kind. The Roman emperors since the time of Augustus used that fact to supply no fewer than 200,000 citizens in the city of Rome regularly with free grain from North Africa and Egypt, to support markets in other parts of the empire, and to provide its huge armies with leather and clothing. A large variety of goods were collected as tax in kind, such as wood for shipbuilding, ox hides for shoes, hemp for oil, and silk for fine clothing. Under the Ptolemies, Egyptian taxes and rents in kind were used for state marketing as well as for luring merchants into the country in order to make a profit on their currency exchange. Yet cash was in many ways a preferred medium of taxation for its flexible use, cheap transport, and symbolic imperial meaning. The question, however, of what proportion of the aggregate value of imperial tax incomes was collected in cash is contested, and if cash incomes were larger at any particular moment, this must be regarded as an exceptional rather than predictable development. Cash taxation requires a great amount of enforcement costs.

Already under Persian administration, parts of Asia were taxed in cash.³⁷ But rather than responding to commercial development, it forced tax subjects into commercial transactions. It mobilized cash resources insofar as they had been treasured and hoarded so far. For satraps, temples, and other institutional

³⁶ Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires*, p. 60.

³⁷ Jursa, "Grundzüge der Wirtschaftsform," pp. 124-7.

landholders, rather than the peasants on the fields, were made responsible for the conversion of agrarian surplus into cash. This surfaces when we look at subsequent periods. The Hellenistic kings took over from the Persians a mixed system of taxation in cash and kind, for the collection of which local administrations and temples seem to have been fully liable at first.³⁸ Taxation in kind continued to operate within the traditional institutions of collection and storage, but for cash taxes they gradually introduced tax-farmers who came to be responsible for tax collection from the population itself. Tax-farmers played an important role in mediating between the economy in cash and in kind. But peasants also were introduced to cash by being paid small wages for labor service and employment in the industries owned by the king. In China, comparable structures emerge. Cash taxes were boosted from the time of the Warring States by a gradual reduction of land taxation in kind and by increasing capitation and property taxes, levied in cash. Number and volume of cash taxation was greatly increased during the early years of Han. There is no direct evidence of how peasants got hold of cash to pay their taxes, but scholars assume it was through a combination of marketing, wage labor, and intermediation by landlords and merchants. Both peasant marketing and intermediation must have mobilized large quantities of commodities and cash.³⁹

Urban markets played an increasingly crucial role in mobilizing agrarian surplus and converting it into cash, either because of the tax-farming system or because of large landowners who collected both rents and taxes from their tenants in kind and sold them in urban markets as part of their large-scale economies. By the first century CE, many cities had become nodal points of larger systems of exploitation and transfers, converting local taxes and rents into exportable items of trade and cash. Without the extraction of resources that was caused and facilitated by imperial taxation, elongated lines of trade and the resultant network of interregional exchange that was ultimately centered on a few large capitals would not have emerged in the same ways.⁴⁰

38 Sitta von Reden, *Money in Ptolemaic Egypt: From the Macedonian Conquest to the End of the Third Century B.C.* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 34; 84–111.

39 Sadao, "Economic and Social History," pp. 596–601.

40 Peter F. Bang, "Commanding and Consuming the World: Empire, Tribute and Trade in Roman and Chinese History," in Walter Scheidel (ed.), *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient Empires* (Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 104. Sitta von Reden, "Money and Finance," in Scheidel (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy*, pp. 266–87.

Interregional trade and global exchange

Extensive networks of exchange predicated on taxation, elite consumption, and military expansion predate our period and generated technology and structures for interregional exchange to develop further in the first millennium. Most advanced had been the networks centered in Mesopotamia, reaching across the Persian Gulf into the Arabian Peninsula in the south, and Persia in the north.⁴¹ Another such network had spanned between Egypt via Cyprus and the Levant to Anatolia, and between Egypt, Nubia, and the African Red Sea kingdoms further south.⁴² The northeastern region of China up to the age of the Zhou Dynasty, by contrast, was as yet a rather isolated region, stretching no further into the East China Sea than modern Taiwan.

In the early first millennium, after a period of political fragmentation, the highly competitive city-states of the Phoenician coast, most notably Tyre, developed new commercial directions which in the west reached, via Cyprus, North Africa, and Sicily, to the Spanish coast. Towards the east, and possibly in cooperation with the new kingdom of Israel, Phoenicians secured access to the Euphrates region, Mesopotamia and northern Arabia, while their navigational skills led them into the gold-producing countries along the Red Sea coast, possibly as far as the Indian Ocean.⁴³ Typically, the Phoenician trade network seems to have worked through trading settlements abroad (*emporía*), and private enterprise was limited. Though the evidence is inconclusive, some scholars argue that Phoenician trade was organized by the aristocracies of the city-states rather than by independent professional merchants.⁴⁴ This raises the important issue about the extent to which long-distance exchange in the early first millennium can be regarded as trade.

Most Bronze Age exchange networks have been identified only by shared metallurgical practices and an exchange of material culture visible in elite burial. Thus, we find an early interregional exchange network in Southeast Asia from the beginning of Eastern Zhou (seventh century BCE).⁴⁵ Exchange and common metallurgical practice are also found in the northern Chinese zone from the Late Western Zhou and Early Spring and Autumn period

41 Christopher Edens, "Dynamics of Trade in the Mesopotamian 'World System,'" *American Anthropologist* 94 (1992): 118–39.

42 Cyprian Broodbank, *The Making of the Middle Sea* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

43 María Eugenia Aubet, *The Phoenicians and the West: Politics, Colonies, and Trade* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), with reference to the biblical tradition; more hesitant to accept this tradition, Bedford, "The Persian Near East," p. 323.

44 Bedford, "The Persian Near East," and Aubet, *The Phoenicians and the West*; by contrast W. Ameling, *Karthago. Studien zu Militär, Staat und Gesellschaft* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1993).

45 Charles Higham, *The Bronze Age of South-East China* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

(ninth to seventh century BCE).⁴⁶ At the other end of the world, the semi-sedentary continental European populations developed gradually a common material culture through migration and exchange.⁴⁷ In the second quarter of the first millennium, two developments took place that in the long term profoundly affected the nature of exchange in the Afro-Eurasian region: the conquest of large parts of Asia by the Persians, and the expansion of Greek exchange in the Mediterranean.

The Persians are famous for having created a network of roads throughout their imperial territory, which laid the foundations for the movement of goods through formerly inaccessible territory. The Persian king Darius was also remembered for having built canals and *emporía* on the Egyptian Red Sea coast linking the Nile with the Arabian Peninsula. We have extremely little evidence for trade along these roads and routes under Persian domination. Nevertheless, there is still much to suggest that the larger part of goods that were moved along Persian roads down to the middle of the millennium were forms of tribute rather than items of commercial trade.⁴⁸

The second development was the growth of Greek power in the Mediterranean. During the first half of the first millennium, the Greeks had not been aggressive conquerors, nor did they develop into serious competitors of the Carthaginian-Phoenician trade network in the Western Mediterranean. They had established Phoenician-type *emporía* at the Levant and on the western Italian coast as early as the eighth century BCE. They had also been granted a trading post in Egypt during the late seventh century BCE. However, rather than competing for trade, they established an interconnected urban culture based on collective political participation, exchange, and consumption.⁴⁹ Their cities differed both from the *emporía* that had been established for trading purposes in harbors and frontier zones, and from the capitals that were dominated by palaces and courts in the various African and Asian empires, including China. Wider social groups participated in the exchange system of their cities and gained access to urban markets as consumers through an ideology of political participation and equality. Greek

46 Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 44–92.

47 Peter S. Wells, *Beyond Celts, Germans and Scythians: Archaeology and Identity in Iron Age Europe* (London: Duckworth, 2001).

48 Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), pp. 357–87; Bedford, “The Persian Near East,” p. 325.

49 Nicolas Purcell and Peregrine Horden, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), for city culture, consumption, and Mediterranean connectivity; Robin Osborne, *Greece in the Making 1200–479* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 185–200, for the foundation of Greek settlements abroad.

aristocrats and civic governments within this exchange system aimed at opening markets by interfering with trade and prices of staples.⁵⁰

Democracy was not long-lasting, but with the Macedonian conquest of the Persian Empire, including Egypt, at the end of the fourth century BCE, Greek urban culture, centered on civic interaction spread toward Central Asia and Egypt.⁵¹ And while large parts of that empire were soon lost to local kingdoms and stronger imperial networks in central Asia, Greek urban culture, in many intercultural varieties, remained strong. When, in the first century CE, the Chinese expanded into the Tarim Basin (present-day Xinjiang province) that bordered on the emerging Kushan Empire, hybrid coins were adopted with Greco-Indian motifs on one side and Chinese symbols or weight marks on the other.⁵² The Greek language remained one of the dominant means of communication in Egyptian, Western and Central Asian trading communities down to the Muslim conquest and beyond.⁵³

On the Indian subcontinent greater degrees of cultural cohesion emerged in the fifth century BCE. Buddhism, a new religion building on older Brahman traditions, was one of the articulating elements in this new cultural cohesion. The Mauryan dynasty, reaching its height of power under the king Ashoka in the third century BCE, unified most of the South Asian world and created a broad, if short-lived, victory of Buddhism. More importantly, it created a political framework for a shared culture of consumption that began to be recognizably Indian despite regional variation. The Qin and Han dynasties united China for the first time and fostered economic development in the ways described in previous sections. They helped to integrate and synthesize local cultures to much greater degrees even than the Mauryans and Hellenistic Greeks had achieved further west.

The East–West trade along the Silk Roads and the Indian Ocean from the third century BCE onwards is treated in much detail in Chapter 18 of this volume. It is worth noting, however, that the importance of what in global perspective may be called regional networks of exchange continued to exceed

50 Armin Eich, *Die Politische Ökonomie des antiken Griechenland (6.-3. Jahrhundert v. Chr.)* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1986), pp. 218–38.

51 Susan Sherwin-White and Amélie Kuhrt, *From Samarkand to Sardis: A New Approach to the Seleucid Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Richard Billows, “Cities,” in Andrew Erskine (ed.) *A Companion to the Hellenistic World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 196–215.

52 Craig Benjamin, “The Kushan Empire,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Civilisations* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

53 G. W. Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis: The Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 26–27, 30–31, and 45.

the role of intercontinental trade along those routes. It is almost certain, although it cannot be proved, that the aggregate value of the goods that went on the long journey from Eastern and Central Asia to the Mediterranean and on to Rome was only a fraction of the aggregate value of the same range of goods that continued to circulate in much smaller geographical confines.⁵⁴ The most significant fact of intercontinental trade was that the value of individual journeys was huge, and that it was dependent on the consumptive capacities of rather narrow social elites.

By the beginning of the Common Era, both the East African coastline and Arabia and India were settled with harbor towns connected inland by river and caravan roads.⁵⁵ Some show archaeological traces of permanent foreign trading communities, which confirms that the intercontinental trade to the east and the west was regular and in the hands of professional traders. According to the Roman geographer Strabo, up to 120 ships per year set sail from Myos Hormos on the Red Sea to India (Strab. 2.5.12). A business letter accounting for a maritime loan related to a trade journey from Egypt to Muziris on the West Indian coast gives us an idea of the importance of India and Egypt for the movement of goods between Asia and the Mediterranean in the first century CE. On the single journey attested in that papyrus, c. 135 tons of tusks, pearls, and spices were shipped with a total value of almost 7 million Egyptian drachmas after the subtraction of 25 percent worth of tolls. This was equal to the price of roughly 1,765 ha of moderately productive arable land in Italy.⁵⁶

The East–West connection from China to the Mediterranean went via India and the South Arabian coast. But the Arabian kingdom and Ethiopian destinations, then under Arabian control, were by no means negligible. The *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, a first-century CE treatise on trading opportunities in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, suggests much internal trade between Arabian and Indian cities, which not only native traders but also Egyptian merchants

54 Armin Selbitchka, *Prestigegüter entlang der Seidenstraße? Archäologische Untersuchungen zu Chinas Beziehungen zu Kulturen des Tarimbeckens vom zweiten bis frühen fünften Jahrhundert nach Christus* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), vol. 1; Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*, pp. 131–34 and 248; and Xinru Liu, *Ancient India and Ancient China: Trade and Religious Exchanges AD 1–600* (New Delhi: Vicas, 1988).

55 Steven E. Sidebotham, *Berenike and the Ancient Mediterranean Spice Route* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011) for the Hellenistic period; Gary K. Young, *Rome's Eastern Trade: International Commerce and Imperial Policy, 31 BC – AD 305*, London: Routledge, 2001; Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis*.

56 D. W. Rathbone, "The 'Muziris' Papyrus (SB XVIII 13167): Financing Roman Trade with India," *Alexandrian Studies II in Honour of Mostafa el Abbadi*, *Bulletin du Archéologie d'Alexandrie* 46 (2001): 39–50; for land prices, Harris, "The Late Republic," p. 524.

seem to have shipped during their long-term journeys. Goods, moreover, came either from local places, or from farther away. China supplied silks to the cities on the East Indian coast, while Italian and Phrygian wine, as well as olive oil, coins, tin, saffron, or coral from other parts of the Roman Empire, passed through Egypt into the Indian Ocean. To judge from the *Periplus*, trade could mean quite a number of things: some goods were freely exchanged in markets according to supply and demand; others were labeled as destined directly for some Indian court: statues, expensive copper, gold and silver ware, horses, mules, and slaves. This suggests that free trade was not separated in practice from politically directed trade to particular destinations. Similarly, we find both monetized trade and barter along the Indian coast.⁵⁷

There was thus no clear distinction between “engines” and “passageways” of trade, so convincingly identified by Smith for the economy from 1000 CE onwards.⁵⁸ Regions with a precarious agrarian base grew wealthy through their geo-economic location, such as the city-states of Sogdiana along the central Asian route from China, Adulis in the Axumite kingdom in East Africa, Petra in the Nabatean kingdom of the northern Arabian Peninsula and above all Palmyra which, during the third century CE, dominated large parts of central Asia with its powerful military.⁵⁹ But once we focus more narrowly on the local histories of cities of the Silk Roads, we find that they were more than posts on passageways. They thrived on the money from passing trade, but their aristocracies also profited from the access to established symbols of social distinction. Some of these aristocracies rose to political and military power, and became vital for the spread of faiths in Asia after 400 CE. It was not just traders spreading faiths, but local social hierarchies catching the opportunity to engage successfully with the symbolic system of other peers.

Neither does the trade of late antique Mecca provide an explanation for the rise of Islamic power, as is claimed in Islam religious historiography and in numerous popular accounts. The city did not lie on one of the major cross-roads of South and East Arabian trade which rather favored the sea routes.

57 Lionel Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei: Text with Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 29–31, 41.

58 See Smith, CWH, Volume v, chapter 16.

59 F. Millar, “Caravan Cities: The Roman Near East and Long-Distance Trade by Land,” in Michel Austin, Jill Harries, and Christopher Smith (eds.), *Modus Operandi: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Rickman* (London: The Institute of Classical Studies, 1998), pp. 121–37; also Young, *Rome’s Eastern Trade* for Palmyra and Petra; Liu (this volume) for Sogdiana; Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis*, for Adulis.

Meccan trade, as Patricia Crone has shown, was purely local and dominated by ordinary local products, rather than luxuries.⁶⁰ The Arabian Peninsula remained socially and tribally fragmented, as it had always been in the last centuries. Mecca was not a center of pilgrimage and market exchange, and the alleged mercantile economy did not disrupt a united social order that had existed before. Arguably, the great attraction of Muhammad's teaching resided in its combination of monotheism built on ancestral religious tradition, and a new form of tribal harmony that had never existed before. Behind the meteoric rise of Muslim power toward a world empire may be discovered the well-known connection between state-formation and military expansion, now spurred by a religious mission.

Religion became an important factor for consumption, conquest, and trade from the fifth century CE onwards. In Chapter 17 of this volume, Xinru Liu shows how silk decorations in the royal representation of the Byzantine emperors in Constantinople had an important impact on silk consumption from the time of Justinian I (r. 527–565 CE) onwards. In China silk came to be used by the court to endow Buddhist monasteries in the hope of being reborn into a better life. After the increasing disintegration of the Roman Empire in the Mediterranean, and of China in eastern Asia, the geo-economic space of Europe, North Africa, and western to eastern Asia was gradually reordered.⁶¹ China did not reunite before the Sui and Tang, while in Western Europe the centers of political and economic power shifted from the Mediterranean to the inner continent and the Baltic from the sixth century onwards. During the prosperous early period of the Byzantine Empire, the wine trade between Constantinople, Gaza, and the Negev flourished and most likely expanded, with a concomitant stimulus to ceramics production in harbor towns and production centers. But alongside growing prosperity in the Byzantine Empire, there was also structural change. Both texts and archaeological remains of sunken ships point to merchants' efforts to move away from highly taxed markets in the cities to more informal market places in smaller settlements and waterside landings.⁶² With the Muslim conquest of Syria in

60 Crone, *Meccan Trade*.

61 See Liu, "Case Study: Exchanges within the Silk Roads World System," Chapter 17, this volume.

62 Angeliki E. Laiou and Cécile Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce AD 300–900* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Michael McCormick "Movements and Markets in the First Millennium: Information, Containers and Shipwrecks," www.history.upenn.edu/econichistoryforum/dods/mccormick_09.pdf, accessed March 21, 2013.

the early seventh century, followed by Egypt, North Africa, Morocco, Spain as well as Sassanid Persia, the Arabs dominated the southern part of the Mediterranean and Asia as far as the Caucasus in the north and the Indus toward the east. This separated a Mediterranean unity which had been characteristic of Afro-Eurasian history since the Phoenician and Greek colonization period, and created a new economic space centered on the Islamic heartland, while India and China reemerged as its most important competitors.⁶³

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The gendering of power in the family and the state

SCOTT WELLS AND PING YAO

The formation of states, empires, and trans-regional networks across Eurasia and northern Africa led to dramatic transformations in both social and political relations between men and women. In this chapter, we analyze the interactions and performances of individuals and communities whose traditional gendered identities and roles had become further complicated by the distinction between member (subject, citizen, etc.) and non-member of a political entity (state or empire) defined by law, sovereignty, and competition with other states as well as non-states ("barbarians"). It is organized into two sections: the first on marriage, the family, and inheritance of property and status; the second on the gendering of public power in the political and religious arenas. Each of the two sections is structured in the same way. After defining the topic and providing some general reflections and examples, we then explore in depth the evolution of marriage and the family, or religious and political power, in the Mediterranean world and the Chinese empire. This will provide the reader with a representative coverage of the multiple ways in which status and authority were gendered in the context of states, empires, and emerging trans-regional exchange networks. The conclusion elaborates on the comparative framework we recommend for a more complete understanding of the relationship between state- and network-formation on the one hand, and changing understandings of marriage, the family, and men's and women's public and religious power on the other.

Marriage, family, and the inheritance of property and status

There is no universal or standard form of marriage, just as there is no universal or standard type of family, so to identify how state-formation or the emergence of trans-regional networks affected marriage and the family is no straightforward task. Nevertheless, people who lived in pre-modern states

would recognize that their communities practiced a form of contractual union between two persons (the male husband and the female wife) that included an exchange of property between those persons (dowry, bride price, etc.) and the relocation of one (or both) persons to a new domicile. They would also recognize the purpose of such a union as twofold: to strengthen the social and economic bonds between the kin of the husband and the wife, and to produce offspring who would ultimately inherit the property brought together by the two parties to the marriage. Some societies allowed a husband to have multiple wives simultaneously (polygyny). Most allowed a form of serial polygamy, with both husband and wife permitted or encouraged to take on a new partner after separation from their previous spouse through divorce or death. Even so, monogamy was frequently portrayed as an ideal, especially for women.¹

Whether polygamous or monogamous, marital unions were endogamous with respect to the social category they were designed to enhance and perpetuate through investment of property and production of children. But this endogamy could be with respect to categories other than kin, such as socio-economic class, civic or political identity, or religious allegiance. State-formation, empire building, and the expansion of trans-regional networks changed the definitions and practices of endogamy by expanding the number and extent of economic and social bonds of the community beyond the kin-based and local emphasis of their pre-state and pre-urban condition, even as the conjugal (binding-together) and reproductive purposes of marriage remained in place. Indeed, marriage could function to preserve and reinforce local socio-economic networks in an environment of expanding trans-regional economies and interstate competition.

In India, for example, the proliferation of cities, interregional networks, and the expansion of kingdoms over the course of the Vedic period (c. 1700–500 BCE) correlates to the codification of endogamy grounded in socio-professional identity (caste or *varna*) rather than kin. As the number of professions increased, so too did the number of *jatis* or subcategories of *varna*, each likewise endogamous. Buddhism, whose greatest success in India began in the continent-spanning empire of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka (303–232 BCE), was an ideology that challenged caste-based endogamy in asserting the irrelevance of inherited status as a measure of worth with respect to dharma (the right path of being). In promoting Buddhism, Ashoka fostered the

1 Compare, e.g., with Walter Scheidel, "A Peculiar Institution? Greco-Roman Monogamy in Global Context," *History of the Family* 14 (2009): 280–91.

development of new religious and social networks as part of the building of his trans-regional state. In the struggle between Buddhism and Brahmanism, however, the endogamies of classical Hinduism prevailed, being more strongly rooted in local and regional networks that preferred a system which kept the transmission of property confined primarily to the bounds of the *jati* to a system that called for the intergenerational distribution of property to be expanded more widely. Endogamy based on *jati* was also given added value for the priestly and warrior *varnas*, by the association of superiority in social status (as twice-born castes, better prepared for spiritual liberation) with the avoidance of any pollution that might come through physical contact with people from the lower *varnas*, for instance through sexual intercourse or by eating foods prepared by or associated with lower or non-caste persons.²

In Nara (710–794 CE) and Heian (794–1185 CE) Japan, by comparison, status endogamy among the elite was expressed through uxorilocal marriage arrangements (in which the husband moved from his parent's residence to live with his new wife's family). This practice could be used to forge long-standing political and economic alliances, creating multi-generational networks of exchange between prominent families to their mutual benefit in preserving or enhancing social status. The Heian period is also known as the Fujiwara period, for instance, because of the succession of intermarriages during these centuries between the imperial dynasty and the Fujiwara clan. The Fujiwara possessed land and resources far greater than those of the imperial clan, and through intermarriage joined their wealth with the political legitimacy of the succession of fathers and sons in the imperial line. By the middle of the ninth century, the Fujiwara clan had ensured that each crown prince (and hence emperor) was the son of one of their daughters. In many cases, these princes had also been born and raised in a Fujiwara residence. Heian emperors were often persuaded to officially abdicate in favor of a young son, and the maternal grandfather of the Fujiwara family would then rule as regent (*sesshō*). The Fujiwara regency (c. 859–1159) began with Fujiwara no Yoshifusa (804–872) and would reach its height during the rule of Fujiwara Michinaga (966–1027), who was the grandfather of three emperors and the father of six empresses.³

2 Romila Thapar, *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

3 See William H. McCullough, *Japanese Marriage Institutions in the Heian Period* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1967).

Marriage, family, and inheritance in the Mediterranean world

In the democratic city-states of Classical Greece (c. 490–323 BCE), marriages tended to be endogamous to members of each city's citizen class, although marriages that united a citizen man and citizen woman of two different city-states were also recognized as legitimate. Marriage, for the male citizen, was a marker of entry into full adulthood; the citizen wife, however, retained the legal status of a child, with her legal claims and rights (e.g. in property disputes) exercised on her behalf through a male guardian, whether her husband or her father. Slaves and other non-citizen foreigners could not form or be part of legitimate, civic marital unions. Even as other forms of alliance (political, economic, and sexual) were proliferating among and within the city-states in the era of the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars (fifth century BCE), marital bonds remained exclusive to the citizenry, and thereby a key mechanism for preserving the population and property that undergirded the political autonomy of the polis. In Athens, for example, while only men could possess, bequeath, and inherit land and the related right to wield public office, both men *and* women enjoyed and shouldered the responsibilities of citizen status for purposes of marriage and sexual reproduction. Athenian citizens of both sexes could have only one spouse at a time, but divorce was countenanced for either partner as a strategy for socio-economic reproduction of the specific patrilineages that constituted this endogamous citizen class. In cases where a father died leaving only a daughter behind as his heir (*epikleros*), her closest male paternal relative was legally obligated to wed her to prevent the property from leaving the deceased father's family line. Both the *epikleros* and her male relation were required to divorce from their current (more distantly related) spouses if they were already married.⁴

Athenian marital and inheritance practices were typical for Greek city-states. Sparta, however, proved a notable exception, in that it allowed citizen women as well as men to own, bequeath, and inherit property. Because Spartan men were in a constant state of war, particularly against the subject *helot* population of Messenia, they were often absent from the territory of Sparta itself. Allowing women to own property outright therefore recognized and incentivized the need for wives to participate in estate management beyond the household. Spartan women also uniquely received public education and physical training alongside men, with the express purpose of

4 Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Families in Classical and Hellenistic Greece: Representations and Realities* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), and Louis Cohn-Haft, "Divorce in Classical Athens," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 115 (1995): 1–14.

preparing them to bear and raise strong and effective citizens for the polis. The Spartan constitution even encouraged polyandry to ensure preservation of the citizen class and its wealth, stipulating that an old man who married a young wife should select a younger citizen man to have children with his wife; similarly, any married man could approach another man's wife, as long as she had already had children, and – with her husband's permission – have children with her instead of his own wife. These practices succeeded in supporting the wealth and power of Sparta for several centuries; but once Sparta became “just” another city-state in terms of economic and military power following its loss of Messenia in 369 BCE, Sparta's (male) government appears to have modified its marital and inheritance practices to deprive women of previously possessed rights and responsibilities, bringing their status in line with that of citizen women in other city-states.⁵

Neither the Macedonian nor the Roman conquests radically changed marital or inheritance practices in the Greek city-states. The Hellenistic royal families (323–30 BCE) formed a close, endogamous ruling class: Seleucid kings married Antigonid and Ptolemaic princesses, and Antigonid kings married Seleucids and Ptolemies, while Ptolemaic monarchs preferred to marry their own siblings following pharaonic precedent.⁶ Rome, in turn, restricted the Roman law and practice of *conubium* to Roman citizens, excluding conquered free peoples (i.e. non-slaves) integrated into the empire by requiring them to retain their local traditions regarding marriage and inheritance until such time as they might be granted Roman citizenship. As Rome expanded from city-state to a regional power in the fourth century BCE, marital unions were exogamous with respect to lineage, but endogamous with respect to socio-political status. Patricians would intermarry with other patricians, equestrians with equestrians, and plebeians with plebeians, blurring the boundaries of kin as part of the process of solidifying the collective wealth and prerogatives of social class. As Rome then expanded into a Mediterranean-wide empire between the third and first centuries BCE, two developments in marriage practice occurred. First, as the expanding empire opened up new opportunities in commerce and state service to Roman citizens, creating an increase in wealthy equestrian and plebeian families, cross-class marriages within the

5 Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Spartan Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), and Robert K. Fleck and F. Andrew Hanssen, “Rulers Ruled by Women’: An Economic Analysis of the Rise and Fall of Women's Rights in Ancient Sparta,” *Economics of Governance* 10 (2009): 221–45.

6 Sheila Ager, “The Power of Excess: Royal Incest and the Ptolemaic Dynasty,” *Anthropologica* 48 (2006): 165–86.

category of Roman citizen became more common. Second, the power of the male head of the household over his wife substantially decreased. Originally, the standard Roman marriage moved the woman from her father's *patriapotestas* to her husband's. In this *conubium cum manu*, the husband gained the absolute authority of a paternal guiding hand over his wife's property and behavior. However, as Rome increased its territorial and commercial networks, *conubium sine manu* (without the hand) became the norm. In theory, the wife remained under the *patriapotestas* of her father, but in practice that meant she enjoyed a high degree of autonomy within the marriage, controlling her property with an independence that became absolute upon her father's death, or earlier if he legally emancipated her. This maximized Roman citizens' capacity to increase the economic opportunities provided by their expanding empire by allowing both husband and wife to function as autonomous investors and managers of wealth.⁷

While Roman citizenship was initially inherited, it could also be granted to individuals or groups by governmental action. In 212 CE, the emperor Caracalla extended Roman citizenship to virtually all the empire's non-slave inhabitants. With respect to marriage, property, and inheritance, this extension of Roman citizenship removed a final barrier that had prevented, or at least limited economically advantageous, marriages between citizens and non-citizens. It also meant that all free residents of the empire now formed a legally endogamous entity, collectively defining and reproducing a universal state. In the fourth and fifth centuries, in conjunction with Christianization, several important changes were introduced with respect to marriage legislation. The laws limiting the inheritance rights of single adults (the never-married) were rescinded, which had the effect of increasing the economic resources available to the celibate Christian clergy, including monks and nuns. Divorce, however, which had previously been a private matter that left both husband and wife free to dissolve their marriage bond for any cause, was now restricted to cases where a spouse had committed a serious criminal offense such as adultery, murder, or sorcery. In other respects, the social and legal changes associated with Christianity did not radically transform the Roman practice or ideology of marriage. Chaste monogamy, for instance, was a long-standing Roman ideal, whether in the lauding of the *univira* (the woman who married only once) or in allowing slaves with their owner's

7 Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), and Richard P. Saller, *Patriarchy, Property, and Death in the Roman Family* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

permission to form a male–female non-marital but monogamous *contubernium* (“concubinage”).⁸

The fragmentation of the Roman political order during the fifth to seventh centuries CE similarly fragmented the standardization of marriage practices and customs that had been achieved. Christianized Roman practices remained intact in Byzantium. In the provinces integrated into the Islamic caliphate during the seventh century CE, multiple endogamies defined by religion became the norm. Muslims married Muslims, under the marriage laws and customs defined by the Quran and Islamic law, just as Christians married Christians. As the political and economic situation of the caliphate stabilized under the Abbasids, more and more Christians (as well as Zoroastrians, in what had been the Sasanian Empire) converted to Islam and became endogamous with the Muslim conquerors to reap the benefits for themselves and their descendants of becoming fully incorporated into the vast network of the *dar al-Islam*.⁹ In the western provinces, Christianity endured and spread beyond the frontiers of the old Roman state, but did not impose marital uniformity. With the collapse of the universal Roman legal system in the West during the fifth century CE, a multitude of customs and practices emerged in the various Germanic and Celtic kingdoms, despite their nominally shared Christianity. In the areas that had been imperial provinces, however, two trends can be observed in the post-Roman period. First, elite Germans and Romans asserted their cultural distinctiveness (even if these identities were invented), and preserved it through a high degree of ethnic endogamy. Second, marriage *sine manu* disappeared, along with the decline in trade and manufacture in Western Europe. With wealth concentrated in localized landholdings rather than a range of commercial and geographically disbursed investments, husbands resumed control over their wives’ property and economic contributions to the household (as had happened in Sparta after that city-state lost control of Messenia). As part of the consolidation of this new landed elite, the ethnic endogamy practiced by the post-conquest Romans was abandoned in most regions by the seventh century CE, and the former Roman elites intermarried into the lineages and ethnic identity of the conquerors (Franks, Anglo-Saxons, Goths, Lombards).

8 Mathew Kuefler, “The Marriage Revolution in Late Antiquity: The Theodosian Code and Later Roman Marriage Law,” *Journal of Family History* 32 (2007): 343–70, and Marjorie Lightman and William Zeisel, “Univira: An Example of Continuity and Change in Roman Society,” *Church History* 46 (1977): 19–32.

9 Richard Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

Urban elites in Italy and southern Gaul remained notable exceptions, preserving a Roman identity and endogamy under Roman law and marriage practices along with their economic links to Byzantium.¹⁰

Marriage, family, and inheritance in imperial China

In China, family and the inheritance of property evolved along with the waxing and waning of the patriarchal system as well as the composition of the ruling class. During the earliest archeologically documented Chinese dynasty, the Shang (c. 1600–1046 BCE), the state maintained its dominance by actively expanding political alliances and fiercely conquering enemy tribal states. An important tool in forming political networks and consolidating territory was marriage. Shang kings took multiple wives, the majority of them from other tribal states. A major development during the Shang dynasty was the ascent of King Wu Ding (d. c. 1189 BCE). To maintain and stabilize dynastic rule, King Wu Ding initiated the succession of kingship from father to son (instead of a brother or an uncle) and systematized ancestor worship. These royal decrees heralded the formation of the Lineage Law (*zongfa*) system, which privileged the eldest son of the principal wife in the inheritance of property (as well as political and economic power). Such arrangements matured during the Western Zhou dynasty (1046–771 BCE), and dictated gender roles and relations throughout early China.¹¹ By the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), Chinese society had become firmly patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal. Consequently, the practice of polygyny changed as well, from a man marrying multiple women to a man marrying one wife and multiple concubines who were legally married to the man but with lower status than that of a wife in the family. This change, started in the Western Zhou dynasty, was clearly intended to boost the position of the Main Line (*dazong*), or the eldest son of the principal wife.

While it was not strictly enforced, endogamy was nevertheless a dominant practice throughout pre-modern China, sometimes in the form of cross-cousin marriage, and more generally in the form of status-based endogamy. In Chinese tradition, marriage was understood as an ideal means of forming and consolidating political alliances and socio-economic networks. The

¹⁰ Kate Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), and Walter Pohl, "Gender and Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages," in Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (eds.), *Gender In the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300–900* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 23–43.

¹¹ See Yiqun Zhou, *Festivals, Feasts, and Gender Relations in Ancient China and Greece* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Confucian classic, *Book of Rites* (*Liji*), a collective account of ancient Chinese perceptions of proper rules and etiquette compiled around the first century BCE, advocates that “the ceremony of marriage was intended to unite the goodness of two surnames, to secure the services in the ancestral temple, and to secure the continuance of the family line.” A marriage without a series of discussions among elder kin (usually the parents of the bride and the groom) through a go-between would be shunned by relatives and society, as Mencius (372–289 BCE) put it.¹² By prohibiting young men and women from seeking love on their own, such customs made sure that the spousal selection pool would be confined within the same economic ranking, social standing, or set of multi-generational intermarried clans.

The consolidation of patriarchy was due, in no small part, to the Han Empire’s embrace of Confucianism. Under Confucianism, state and society were an extension of the hierarchical family, which functioned at its best when everyone acted properly in his/her position and assigned role. Furthermore, Han intellectuals relied on Confucianism to develop a very distinctive political ideal of sovereignty that centered on an exemplary emperor whose power was directly sanctioned by Heaven. The emperor, as the “Son of Heaven,” was the only agent capable of connecting heaven, earth, and humankind. And the Han Empire, under the rule of the Son of Heaven, held an absolute superiority over barbarians.¹³ It was with this ideological underpinning that the Han Empire set out to reinforce the Lineage Law system and the patriarchal structure that Confucius (551–479 BCE) endorsed. During the Han dynasty, the *Book of Rites*, though not a legal code, provided the guidelines for rules of conduct governing individual and familial matters. Its so-called “seven grounds for men and three grounds for women” divorce rules would eventually be incorporated into the *Tang Code*, the first extant law code in East Asia, and kept intact in the law codes of all post-Tang Chinese dynasties, serving as the backbone of Chinese patriarchy. *The Book of Rites* stipulates:

There are seven grounds for repudiating a woman: disobedience to her parents-in-law, for this is against morality; barrenness, for this discontinues a lineage; adultery, for this brings disorder to a clan; jealousy, for this brings disorder to a household; severe illness, for this prevents her from

12 See *The Works of Mencius*, in James Legge (ed.), *The Chinese Classics* (London: Trubner, 1861), vol. 11, p. 268.

13 Michael Loewe, “The Concept of Sovereignty,” in Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), vol. 1, pp. 726–46.

participating in ancestor worship; talkativeness, for this causes disharmony among kinsmen; and stealing (for her own use), for this is against the principles (of family property).

While there was no recourse for a wife to initiate a divorce, mutual agreement to part was possible. Furthermore, a woman was protected from a divorce if she met one of the following three conditions: having no family to return to; having fulfilled three years of mourning duty for her parents-in-law; or marrying into a destitute family that became well off later on. Throughout the period of 1200 BCE to 900 CE, no ritual or legal codes provided a woman with claims to inheritance. She might take some personal property with her when she married into her husband's household, but dowry as a common practice did not occur until after the Tang. In addition, bride price was often paid in symbolic gifts instead of actual monetary wealth.

The Lineage Law system would weaken during the Tang dynasty (618–907), and the period also witnessed the decreasing of patriarchal authority. This change resulted from a long period of interactions between China's imperial dynasties and powerful families of the neighboring regions to the west. For generations before Li Yuan (566–635), the founder of the Tang dynasty, the imperial clan had intermarried widely with non-Chinese tribes. Li Yuan's mother, for example, was from a prominent Turkish clan. The tradition of intermarriage continued for a few generations after Li Yuan. These non-Chinese tribes did not practice the Lineage Law system, nor did they have the ancestor worship ritual or law codes similar to those of the early Chinese dynasties. Raised by their non-Chinese mothers, early Tang rulers were not strict enforcers of the patriarchal tradition. As epitaphs from this period revealed, during the Tang, uxori-local marriage was not uncommon, and married women consistently maintained strong ties with their natal families. Moreover, children born to concubines gained more claims in the family, especially after the Civil Service Examination began to provide men of less prestigious lineages or men born to concubines a path to acquire higher social and political status.

Spousal selections in the Tang era revolved around social and civic identities. During the early Tang period, the so-called "seventeen eminent clans" formed the most powerful social and political bloc in Tang politics, and they practiced exclusive intermarriages among themselves (thus, the spouses were often cousins). To counter these powerful clans, the Tang court adopted the civil service examination to recruit officials. Examination graduates or men with the potential for such success became much more desirable as potential

husbands, and were sometimes given preference over older brothers when it came to selecting the inheritor of the family line. A century into the dynasty, families began to list all sons as inheritors. Even though exclusive intermarriages and the display of superiority of birth among the seventeen clans continued to the very end of the dynasty, as the civil service examination degree holders gradually became the core of the Tang ruling class, the practice of endogamy transformed to include the most successful examination graduates. It is worth noting that the majority of the examination graduates actually came from these clans, but many rose from the families of lower-ranking officials. For example, Bo Juyi (772–846), the most prolific poet of the Tang dynasty and an Advanced Scholar (the highest degree), married a young woman from the Yang Clan of Hongnong. The Hongnong Yang was known to be one of the most sought-after clans among the seventeen. It is said that the highest goal of ambitious young men at the time was to “get the Advanced Scholar degree” and “marry a woman from the [top] five clans.”¹⁴ Even with the decline of the Lineage Law system in the Tang, however, the empire still was the most patriarchal society in East Asia.

The gendering of public power in the religious and political arenas

Expanding states and empires required soldiers, administrators, and judges to wield and defend public authority. All professional bureaucrats were men; women were largely or entirely excluded from these offices in every major pre-modern state and empire, however educated they were and however competent in household management. In monarchies, women could wield public power as the wives, mothers, and daughters of kings and emperors, and in some cases hold the royal title in their own name. Religious institutions also provided women with opportunities to perform public functions as officeholders. Women might also exercise public power informally as the wives and mothers of bureaucrats, as citizens, or by calling on alternative forms of moral or mystical authority that challenged the status quo. However, that women in low-status occupations such as barmaids, actresses, musicians, female prostitutes, and slaves were considered typical “public” women reinforced the idea that the model wife and mother should limit

¹⁴ Denis Twitchett, “The Composition of the Tang Ruling Class: New Evidence from Tunhuan,” in Arthur F. Wright and Denis C. Twitchett (eds.), *Perspectives on the T’ang* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 47–86.

her exercise of power to the authority she could and should wield at home over her household and children.¹⁵

Women's role in promoting new religious networks is evident, for example, at the beginnings of Islam. Muhammad's wife Khadijah (d. 619 CE) was the first convert to the new religion, and women featured prominently among those first Muslims whose recollections of the words and deeds of the prophet (*hadith*) constituted a principal source, alongside the Quran itself, for defining Islamic law and religious practices. The Sufi mystical path also provided a public venue for women like Rabi'a al-Basri (717–801 CE) to promulgate their faith and quest for mystical union with God.¹⁶ In the competition between Brahmanism and Buddhism in South Asia, women were active both as patrons of religious institutions and as devotees. The early Buddhist nuns (sixth century BCE) wrote poems, collected in the *Therigatha*, that publicly testified to the doctrines of their new religion; while the *bhakti* movement in classical Hinduism allowed both men and women to take up the life of a devotee who had rejected all worldly decorum and responsibility to publicly avow and perform their all-consuming love of the god Vishnu or Shiva.¹⁷

The gendering of public power in the Mediterranean world

In the Greco-Roman world, women participated in civic religion as priests of cults and participants in processions, which articulated and reinforced the stable identity of the political community over time. In Athens the Pan-Athenaic festival brought male and female citizens together in a quadrennial celebration of the city-state's foundation, while the similarly quadrennial procession of Athenian citizen girls to the temple of Artemis at Brauron marked their entrance into puberty and the beginning of their transition from pre-adolescent virgin to producer of the next generation of Athenian citizens. Citizen women could also occupy public space to fulfill other ritual functions for their kin, such as gathering water from the city's fountains for bridal ceremonies or processing to cemeteries to honor the dead; but the day-to-day

15 See Sara Culpepper Stroup, "Designing Women: Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and the 'Hetairization' of the Greek Wife," *Arethusa* 37 (2004): 37–73.

16 Asma Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), and Margaret Smith, *Rabi'a the Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints in Islam* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

17 Kathryn R. Blackstone, *Women in the Footsteps of the Buddha: Struggle for Liberation in the Therigatha* (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 1998), and Archana Venkatesan, *The Secret Garland: Antal's Tiruppavai and Naciyar Tirumoli* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

preservation of the worldly welfare of the polis through the exercise of public office, casting ballots, and wielding weapons was restricted to men. Even the home had a man's space (the *andron*) where men would meet their fellow male citizens for dinner and drinking parties with their wives and daughters kept out, female companionship being provided by slaves and foreign "public women" in the form of flute-girls and courtesans. Citizen men were encouraged to bond emotionally and intellectually with each other, including through male-male sexual relationships.¹⁸

Spartan women were renowned in Greece for their freedom and equality to men in education and physical training, but they too were excluded from public office. Sparta was a constitutional monarchy combining elective and appointed office with a hereditary dual-kingship; but even the women of the two royal families, including the wives of the kings, possessed no titles or official role as queens. Spartan women's participation in public religious festivals included competing in foot races dedicated to Hera, but the principal civic purpose of their physical training was the production of healthy offspring: Spartiate women who died in childbirth were publicly commemorated like Spartan men who died in battle. Spartan oral tradition likewise preserved sayings attributed to citizen women as models of how they verbally shamed their fathers, husbands, and sons to uphold Spartan military masculinity in defending the city and its values against foreign armies and influences. Like Athenian male citizens, Spartiate men openly sought bonds of pleasurable intimacy and spiritual companionship in same-sex relationships rather than with spouses.¹⁹

At Rome, the community of Vestal Virgins maintaining the fire of Hestia in the forum embodied the continuity of the Roman state across all the transformations and exposure to external influences that came with state expansion and empire building. Roman mothers participated in many religious observances, such as the winter festival dedicated to Bona Dea and the

18 Joan Breton Connelly, *Portrait of a Priestess: Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece* (Princeton University Press, 2007); Evy Johanne Håland, "The Ritual Year of Athena: The Agricultural Cycle of the Olive, Girls' Rites of Passage, and Official Ideology," *Journal of Religious History* 36 (2012): 256–84; Lisa C. Nevett, "Towards a Female Topography of the Ancient Greek City: Case Studies from Late Archaic and Early Classical Athens (c. 520–400 BCE)," *Gender & History* 23 (2011): 576–96; James N. Davidson, *Courtesans & Fishcakes: The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); and James Davidson, "Bodymaps: Sexing Space and Zoning Gender in Ancient Athens," *Gender & History* 23 (2011): 597–614.

19 Pomeroy, *Spartan Women*; Paul Cartledge, "Spartan Wives: Liberation or License?" in Michael Whitby (ed.), *Sparta* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 131–60; and Anton Powell, "Dining Groups, Marriage, Homosexuality," in Whitby (ed.), *Sparta*, pp. 90–103.

March 1 celebration of the Matronalia, which publicly upheld marriage and motherhood as the citizen woman's primary contribution to the state.²⁰ Romans upheld model examples of republican-era matrons who had used their influence to press their husbands and sons to take actions in the public good. Livy (59 BCE – 17 CE) provided several examples in his *Ab urbe condita* (the history of Rome since the city's founding), including Lucretia's suicide that drove her husband and father to overthrow the monarchy and establish the republic, as well as the case of Gaius Marcius Coriolanus whose mother Veturia and wife Volumnia persuaded this exiled patrician to cease his efforts to return to the city at the head of a foreign army. Many ancient authors likewise praised Cornelia (second century BCE), mother of the revolutionary plebeian politicians Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, for the political advice she gave them and the pride she took in their careers. But Suetonius (69 – c. 122 CE) and Tacitus, historians of the early empire, criticized the ambitions of women like Augustus' wife Livia or Nero's mother Agrippina the Younger who used their positions in the imperial family to exercise political power to the detriment of the public good.²¹

In the later empire, however, the imperial household became a formal branch of the government, alongside a division of the bureaucracy into separate civil and military branches. These changes, associated primarily with the emperor Diocletian (r. 284–305 CE) and designed to further increase the emperor's control over the administration of the state, had a substantial impact on the gendering of public power. Civil bureaucrats articulated definitions of masculinity that contrasted their emphasis on intellectual discipline and the arts of peaceful power with the military leadership's reliance on physical violence and brute force. Key positions in the imperial household were filled by eunuchs, whose castration had removed them from networks of familial reproduction and made them completely dependent on the emperor's patronage and support. While some argued that eunuchs were made greedy, vindictive, and emotionally volatile by their "unmanning," others praised these courtiers for their loyal and single-minded focus on

20 Mary Beard, "The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 70 (1980): 12–27, and Celia E. Schultz, *Women's Religious Activity in the Roman Republic* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

21 Tom Stevenson, "Women of Early Rome as *Exempla* in Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, Book 1," *Classical World* 104 (2011): 175–89; Brigitte Ford Russell, "Wine, Women, and the Polis: Gender and the Formation of the City-State in Archaic Rome," *Greece and Rome* 50 (2003): 77–84; Suzanne Dixon, *Cornelia: Mother of the Gracchi* (New York: Routledge, 2007); and Anthony A. Barrett, *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

imperial service. In effect, two contrasting forms of public masculinity had emerged. One focused on the corporeal strength and training of the soldier's body, associated first with the army, then the Germanic elites of the post-Roman kingdoms, and finally with the warrior nobility of the European Middle Ages. The other emphasized the disciplined intelligence and dedicated spirit of the civil bureaucrat who subordinated the body to the mind, a model adopted by the Christian church to define the manliness (or *virtus*) of Christian priests and bishops, alongside the idea of monks and nuns as spiritual warriors fighting the enemies of God.²²

Both the formal integration of the imperial household into the government bureaucracy and the rise of a Christian ethos of civic service increased the public power wielded by empresses in late antiquity and the Byzantine period. Several imperial consorts played a prominent role in politics, such as Galla Placidia (392–450 CE) and Justinian's wife Theodora (500–548 CE). Irene, the first woman to rule as emperor (r. 797–802), came to power as the champion of icon veneration and religious orthodoxy in a coup against her son, for whom she had earlier served as regent. In the post-Roman Germanic kingdoms of Western Europe, queens were instrumental in partnering with members of the Roman clergy to spread Christianity among the Franks (where Clovis' Burgundian Christian queen worked in conjunction with the Gallo-Roman bishop Remigius to persuade her husband to adopt and impose the new religion in 496 CE) and Anglo-Saxons (where Aethelberht of Kent's Frankish wife Bertha helped pave the way for the conversion of that kingdom by Roman monks who arrived in 597 CE as missionaries sent by Pope Gregory I). Abbesses also played a public role in spreading the faith as missionaries and institution-builders for the Christian church, both in the former provinces of the Roman Empire and in regions like Germany and Ireland beyond the frontiers of the old Roman state.²³

22 Shaun Tougher, "Social Transformation, Gender Transformation? The Court Eunuch, 300–900," in Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (eds.), *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300–900* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 70–82; Conrad Leyser and Kate Cooper, "The Gender of Grace: Impotence, Servitude, and Manliness in the Fifth Century West," *Gender & History* 12 (2000): 536–51; Guy Halsall, "Gender and the End of Empire," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34 (2004): 17–39; and Mathew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (University of Chicago Press, 2001).

23 Kenneth G. Hollum, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Judith Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (Princeton University Press, 2004); and Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500–1100* (University of Chicago Press, 1998).

The gendering of public power in imperial China

In China as well, priestesses and royal women were able to exert great influence in power and authority from time to time. As early as the Shang dynasty, royal women actively participated in court politics, military excursions, and religious ceremonies. Lady Hao (c. 1200 BCE), King Wu Ding's wife, was a leading general of the Shang army in battles against several tribal states. She also served as Wu Ding's diviner and, like all Shang diviners, would in this capacity be recognized as a high-ranking court official who held sway in political decision making. Lady Hao is representative of the fact that Shang royal women were actively involved in the dynasty's power system.²⁴ However, with the firm establishment of the patriarchal Lineage Law system, women's role in politics dramatically declined. Zhou sources, be it the *Historical Records* (*Shiji*), the *Book of Songs*, or archeological discoveries and bronze vessel inscriptions, do not point to any women who were equal players with men either at court or on the battlefield. If anything, the *Historical Records*, authored by Sima Qian (c. 145–86 BCE), and Liu Xiang's *The Biographies of Exemplary Women* ascribed the fall of the Shang dynasty to the last king's indulgence of his consort Da Ji, and the fall of the Western Zhou to King You's (r. 781–771) obsession with Baosi. Worse yet, King You made the fatal mistake of promoting Baosi, a secondary consort, to the position of Queen reserved only for the principal wife.

These narratives, however, also reflected a fear of the increased power that imperial consorts began to enjoy during the Han dynasty, when Sima Qian and Liu Xiang wrote their historical accounts. During the Han, principal imperial consorts were often selected from prominent families in the hope of cementing political connections and support for emperors. The marriage ties, in turn, brought consort families more power: emperors often rewarded a favorite consort by assigning her male relatives to important offices. Moreover, even in the heyday of the dynasty several Han emperors ascended to the throne at a young age, and in these cases the young emperor's mother (the empress dowager) would wield great influence in court affairs by forming a political clique with the official regent, who was often her own brother (the emperor's maternal uncle). One of the most powerful royal women in Chinese history, Lü Zhi (241–180 BCE), or Empress Dowager Lü, entirely cast aside the claims of her son, Emperor Hui, and dominated the

24 Jane Slaughter, Melissa K. Bokovoy, Patricia Risso, Ping Yao, and Patricia W. Romero, *Sharing the World Stage: Biography and Gender in World History* (Independence, KY: Cengage Learning, 2007), pp. 51–69.

political scene for fifteen years until her death. The political influence of the consorts and their families grew even stronger during the Later Han dynasty (25–220 CE) when the majority of emperors ascended to the throne at very young ages (three of them at the age of one). When the young emperors grew older, they tended to resent the regents (and their empress-dowager mothers) and would often rely on eunuchs to curb the power of their maternal families. Thus, the history of the Later Han dynasty was marked by constant conflicts between eunuch factions and consort factions.

Imperial mothers in subsequent dynasties continued to wield political influence through the sway they had over their sons. Empress Wu (624–705) of the Tang dynasty, like Lü Zhi, went so far as to depose her sons, and ruled as the first emperor of her self-proclaimed “Zhou dynasty” from 690 to 705, after thirty years of co-rulership with her husband Emperor Gaozong (who had suffered a stroke in 660). While Empress Wu’s rule was much vilified by Confucian historians, the period of 660–705 gave the empire an expanded territory, increased social mobility, and steady economic growth. Empress Wu’s policies laid the ground for the prosperity of the High Tang era of the first half of the eighth century.²⁵

Buddhist and Daoist nuns, and, to a certain extent, courtesans, also played an important role in the public sphere during the Tang dynasty. However, since the Tang court was actively involved in regulating religious establishments, all powerful female religious leaders were connected, one way or another, to the imperial court: they were either imperial kin or endorsed by the emperors or empresses. For example, among 210 recorded Tang imperial princesses, eleven of them took a vow during early adulthood and lived as Daoist nuns until the end of their lives. The princesses’ decision to lead a religious life was lauded by the court as a manifestation of their female virtue, as well as the imperial clan’s moral prestige. Nevertheless, living independently in nunneries proved to be a great opportunity for some Daoist princesses to amass power and wealth. The fact that most of these princesses entered the monastic order after male court officials began expressing a strong resistance to royal women’s interference in politics after the Empress Wu’s reign suggests that the religious life increased in appeal for royal women when the exercise of public power as the wife or mother of an emperor became more difficult. The Daoist princess Yuzhen (690–762), for example, frequently attended music performances at the palace and was

25 See R. W. L. Guisso, “The Life and Times of the Empress Wu Tse-tien of the Tang Dynasty,” unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Oxford, 1976.

included in routine imperial rites because of her religious office, which came with a sizable stipend: two-thirds of the harvest from 1,400 households. In her later years her estate was reportedly worth the assets of several hundred households. Yuzhen was able to translate her wealth and access at court into political influence by supporting various court factions and petitioning cases on behalf of officials and imperial relatives.

Compared to Daoist nuns, Buddhist nuns generally played a lesser public role. Nevertheless, they were far more influential than elite women who chose a domestic life. One such Buddhist nun was Master Ruyuan (700–775), who was born into the family of Li of Longxi, one of the most eminent lineages of the Tang clan. At the young age of 11, Ruyuan received imperial permission to become a novice in a Buddhist convent, and became fully ordained ten years later. She was said to be widely respected for her intellect, knowledge, and her unyielding faith. She traveled, lectured, organized various religious events, and had a large group of followers who worshiped her as their religious leader. During her later years, she was summoned by Emperor Daizong (r. 762–779) to lecture on Buddhist teachings for the imperial consorts and to preside over Buddhist ceremonies at the imperial palace. She was then appointed an Altar-Presiding Bhadanta of the capital Chang'an. "Altar-Presiding Bhadanta" had been an important title of honor and respect in the Buddhist tradition. However, in 765 CE Emperor Daizong issued an edict to set twenty such positions in Chang'an, ten monks and ten nuns, who would preside over all the Buddhist ordinations in the capital. A spiritual position was thus transformed into a regular governmental post. This practice of transforming spiritual responsibilities and honors into government offices and titles became widespread and continued well into later imperial China. In addition, the emperor bestowed on Ruyuan the title of State Master, the highest position within the state-supervised Buddhist order. Among her disciples were both abbesses and abbots, another Altar-Presiding Bhadanta of the capital, and a sister of the emperor. Master Ruyuan's authority and influence demonstrate the important role Buddhist nuns played both in spiritual matters and in politics as officials of the state.²⁶

Conclusion

The formation and maintenance of states, empires, and trans-regional networks in the ancient world has traditionally been viewed as primarily a

26 On Tang state Buddhism, see Stanley Weinstein, *Buddhism under the T'ang* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

masculine enterprise, contrasted with the feminine world of the household and domestic economy. Indeed, some scholars argue that the building of states and empires, along with the fostering of long-distance trade, contributed to the reduction of the economic and political power women enjoyed in more localized village or tribal societies.²⁷ Others have emphasized that women's subordination to male authority already existed in politically autonomous, small-scale communities organized around a simple agricultural and/or pastoral economy.²⁸ Still others focus on ways that trans-regional religious, economic, and political networks provided women as well as men with new opportunities for wealth creation, exercising power, building social relationships, and articulating a sense of self.²⁹

In this chapter, we adopt an approach that assumes neither net gain nor net loss for women (or men) as a consequence of the political and economic changes that many regions of the world experienced by becoming increasingly interconnected during the millennia between 1200 BCE and 900 CE. This includes rejecting grand narratives that ascribe public political and economic agency in this period primarily (or exclusively) to men, with women confined to the household. The economic, social, religious, and political forms whose emergence and interaction characterize this period are of too great a variety to allow for simple conclusions about how these developments changed gender relations in the domestic, political, and spiritual arenas. What can be said is that individuals, communities, and societies experiencing political, economic, and cultural integration into trans-regional networks (whether that integration was self-initiated or imposed from the outside) faced a series of questions about the respective roles of men and women in that process. Should the range of what one considered to be acceptable marriage partners be maintained, expanded, or reduced? How could the wealth and autonomy of the household best be maintained in the face of powerful new economic and political forces? Should one understand the state as a household writ large, with the subordinate members of the polity subject to the parental authority and love of the ruling family? Or was the state a new institutional form, populated by people who, as citizens, served the common good even while as fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters they served the interests of their household? Could the interests of the state

27 E.g., Carol Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

28 E.g., Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

29 See, e.g., the range of perspectives and evidence in Lin Foxhall and Gabriele Neher (eds.), *Gender and the City before Modernity* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

and of the household be made compatible, and if so how? Did the granting of more citizen rights to men (husbands) than women (wives) play a role here? How people answered these questions and others was – and remains – central to the process of building, maintaining, and navigating the variety of political, economic, and cultural allegiances created by trans-regional integration.

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Slavery

PETER HUNT

Slavery was a widespread institution in the ancient world (1200 BCE – 900 CE). Slaves could be found in simpler societies, but more important and better known was the existence of slavery in most advanced states. Indeed, it is hard to find any ancient civilizations in which some slavery did not exist. Slave use was sometimes extensive. Classical Athens and Roman Italy were true slave societies. Slaves were as central to the social structure, economies, and cultures of these areas as they were to the New World slave societies. Indeed, slavery in the Roman Empire with its 6 million slaves – on a conservative estimate – may possibly have equaled nineteenth-century New World slavery in scale.

The hedge, “may possibly,” in the last sentence illustrates a difference between the study of ancient and modern slavery. Our sources for ancient history in general are spotty and often unrepresentative to begin with; they are even worse when it comes to ancient slavery. Elite men, slaveholders almost without exception, produced the vast majority of ancient texts. Not only do we rarely get the slave’s point of view, but only sporadically was the life of such low-status people a concern of our texts. For example, reliable statistics for total slave numbers are almost impossible to find. A final asymmetry is that we tend to know more about those states or empires that imported slaves than we learn about the less organized areas on their peripheries that typically suffered the enslavement of portions of their population. The larger and more centralized societies usually both did the enslaving and produced the written texts, art, or monuments that remain as evidence. All these difficulties are not intractable, or this would be a short chapter, but the insufficiency of our evidence requires emphasis from the beginning and will concern us throughout.

Every year more than a dozen books are published on classical Greek and Roman slavery alone; this chapter, encompassing slavery throughout the world over two millennia, will necessarily be concise and selective in its treatment. To highlight comparative and global perspectives, the chapter is arranged thematically rather than by ancient society. The first section

considers definitions of slavery. In the second section I discuss the spectrum of different types and levels of slave use. Next, we turn to slavery in pre-state societies and the correlation between slavery and cities, trade, and empires. The reciprocal relationship between slavery and states provides the fourth topic. Enslavement and manumission constitute the subject of the last section. Since specific cases are often more vivid and informative than abstractions, I will frequently adduce examples. Although I have tried to draw these cases from a wide variety of places and times, slavery in the best-documented societies, particularly Greece and Rome, is inevitably overrepresented.

What is slavery?

It may seem surprising that one social institution, unconnected with kinship and biology, should appear in so many different societies across the globe and ages. Although slaves did not play the identical role in tribal societies, in cities of the late antique Mediterranean, in China and Japan, and in the Americas, the institution was recognizably the same across a vast span of places and times. This assertion, however, raises the question: what exactly is slavery? Historians have traditionally defined slaves as people treated as property. This definition usually provides a way to distinguish slavery from other systems of domination. In particular, it seems to cover all the people termed slaves without making distinctions based on their material well-being, which would rule out the affluent and seemingly powerful slaves we find in many ancient slave systems. It also passes another crucial test when it comes to ancient slavery. Although modern slavery is usually contrasted with the wage labor of the industrializing world, ancient slavery was usually an alternative to other classes of *dependent* laborers who lived and worked subject to significant coercion. For example, serfs were tied to the land, required to labor for their lord in addition to paying other rents, and subject to explicitly unequal systems of justice, which often included physical punishment by their lords. Serfs, however, could not be sold separately from their land and their families; they were oppressed but not treated like property. Serfs were not slaves.

Upon close inspection the definition of slaves as property faces difficulties on two fronts. First, people can have property rights in another person without that person being a slave. So, on this score, slavery is not qualitatively different from other relationships that involve property rights in people, for example, a groom's right to his bride in a society with bride price. Second, slaves are never treated consistently as property. For example, most states

with slaves set penalties for slaves who commit a crime. Harsher penalties are usually decreed for slaves, as in Qin and Han China.¹ The problem is that the law generally treats slaves as people responsible for their crimes rather than as simple property.

To solve these quandaries, Orlando Patterson has devised an influential definition that not only is more precise in delimiting slaves but also tells us several additional things about slavery. Patterson defines slavery as the “permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons.”² First, slavery is a permanent condition; manumission is never at the slave’s discretion and, as an inherited condition, slavery is not even limited by a single person’s life span (see Fig. 4.1). Second, violence is at the heart of slavery regardless of whether it is used against a particular slave or not. This criterion reflects the role that violence plays in maintaining such a harsh system of domination: in a wide range of societies, the whip symbolized the command of slaves. Enslavement is also typically conceived of as an appropriate fate for somebody who would otherwise legitimately have suffered a violent death, an enemy in war or a criminal.

These criteria convey the nastiness of slavery but do not yet distinguish slaves from serfs or other downtrodden classes, whose condition is permanent and whom their social superiors treat with violence and contempt. The nub of Patterson’s definition lies in his description of slaves as “natally alienated” and, in other places, “socially dead.” These terms indicate that a slave has none of the rights that a person usually possesses by virtue of birth. A slave is not acknowledged to be a member of a family, a clan, a village, or state. In the ancient world, a world without any notion that one possesses rights just by virtue of being human, natal alienation meant that a slave possessed no countervailing rights that might limit the control his master exerted: without these birthrights and relationships, slaves were socially dead. Note that Patterson is talking only about acknowledged, legitimate rights and relationships. Slaves can, in fact, have families. It is just that neither the slave nor the families acquire any official rights by virtue of their relationship. Natal alienation is a large part of the reason that slaves are dishonored people, something seemingly true even of those “elite” slaves who may be better off in material terms than the vast majority of the free population. This definition illuminates one reason why a slave’s position is particularly

1 Mark Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 215.

2 Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 13.



Figure 4.1 Roman slave collar. The inscriptions on these often included, “Seize me, since I am a runaway,” and promised a reward for the return of the slave. (© Scott Weiner/Retna Ltd./Corbis)

precarious. Slaves have only one acknowledged tie, that of subordination to their masters.

Extent and types of slave use

Historians often distinguish between *slave societies* and *societies with slaves*.³ In a slave society, slaves form a large proportion of the population, sometimes over 30 percent, and play a major role in the economy and especially the

3 David Turley, *Slavery* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 62–100.

central sector of ancient economies, agriculture. Historians often claim that there were only five true slave societies in recorded history – including the ante-bellum South, Brazil, and the Caribbean – but more global perspectives have multiplied the candidates. Of the canonical five, there were two in our period: classical Athens, c. 500–300 BCE (and probably similar Greek city-states) and Roman Italy (and probably Sicily), c. 200 BCE – 200 CE. In contrast, societies with slaves include any society within which the institution of slavery exists. In the ancient world, this included almost all complex societies. Accordingly, groups such as the Essenes, a Jewish sect, who did not possess slaves, were noted as curious exceptions to the general acceptance of slavery.⁴ Indeed, most ancient states possessed more than a mere sprinkling of slaves. We find evidence of large concentrations of slaves in the cases of New Kingdom Egypt, Phoenicia (especially Carthage), Neo-Babylonia, Neo-Assyria, China, the Silla Kingdom in Korea, Visigothic Spain, and southern Iraq under the Abbasid dynasty. For example, in Qin and Han China, some elite individuals owned slaves in the thousands and slavery was associated with agriculture in the Han period.⁵ In one case, where we do possess decent statistics, we find that slaves made up over 10 percent of the population of some towns in Roman Egypt, not enough to make a slave society – especially since the slaves were domestic rather than agricultural – but hardly a marginal institution.⁶ Marxist historians once claimed that ancient Egypt, Babylonia, and China were marked by the slave mode of production – and were thus *a fortiori* slave societies. Recent historians reject such formulations and can show that other classes of dependent peasants rather than slaves dominated the countryside. Nevertheless, slavery was important enough to Egypt, Babylonia, Han China as well as India, Judaea, Assyria, and the Islamic world to be a recognized social status with legal regulations.

It is sometimes useful to decide whether a society at a particular time was or was not a slave society, but in the rest of this chapter we will bracket that issue of classification and focus on two other topics: What functions did slaves perform in ancient societies with different levels of slave use? What consequences followed as the proportion of slaves and thus the social and

4 Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 78–79 and 240–41.

5 E. G. Pulleybank, “The Origins and Nature of Chattel Slavery in China,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 1 (1958): 202 and 220.

6 Neville Morley, “Slavery under the Principate,” in Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (eds.), *Cambridge World History of Slavery* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), vol. 1, p. 267.

cultural importance of slavery increased? Most people associate slavery in the New World with agricultural production, but ancient slavery was a flexible system of labor: slaves performed virtually every sort of service and every category of economically productive work. In addition, slaves could be rented out, which made their use even more adaptable: for example, there seems to have been a market in Athens where one could rent a maid if buying one was too expensive.⁷

As a general tendency, the greater the reliance on slaves the more likely they were to be used in economically productive ways, especially in agriculture, and thus to play a large role in the economy. In contrast, virtually every society with any slaves had domestic slaves. These helped the elite maintain their lifestyle. Slaves performed every service required in a noble's house from cooking to cleaning, from wet-nursing to keeping accounts, from supervising the master's wardrobe to the Romans' *nomenclator*, whose only job was to remember and announce the names of all the visitors to a Roman grandee's house (see Fig. 4.2). Eunuchs were trusted slaves in the houses of the nobility and royalty in many societies.

Women kept as sex objects constituted a ubiquitous subset of slaves. Their position might vary from second-rank wives to concubines and prostitutes. If these women were treated as wives, who would bear legitimate children, they were in the process of being incorporated into their new society and would soon no longer be slaves. African societies provide many examples of such customs.⁸ In addition, both the early and medieval Muslim laws made this incorporation of slave women a legal requirement: when a slave woman gave birth to her master's child, the child was free and the mother would be freed on her master's death – but only if the master acknowledged his paternity.⁹ Frequently, however, sexual slavery was just that. Rape of women captured in war was common – a harsh entrance into slavery. In many societies, significant numbers of woman slaves ended up as sex workers. At classical Athens, we learn of a spectrum of such work. In addition to “flute girls,” who livened up parties with music and sometimes with sexual favors, there were the rough equivalents of escorts – sometimes highly paid, kept-women, and prostitutes, working on the streets or in

7 Theophrastus, *Theophrastus: Characters*, in James Digge (ed.), *Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), vol. XLIII, 22.10.

8 Jack Goody, “Slavery in Time and Space,” in James L. Watson (ed.), *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 37–42.

9 Matthew S. Gordon, “Preliminary Remarks on Slaves and Slave Labor in the Third/Ninth Century ‘Abbāid Empire,’” in Laura Culbertson (ed.), *Slaves and Households in the Near East* (Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2011), p. 80.



Figure 4.2 Euphronius Krater, gymnasium scene with slaves, depicted much smaller, helping free athletes (bpk / Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin / Johannes Laurentius)

brothels.¹⁰ These women included ex-slaves and perhaps some free women, but most of them were slaves, especially at the lower levels of the trade. Even slave kept-women lived a precarious life. A law court speech from classical Athens relates how a well-to-do man grew bored of his long-term mistress and planned to sell her to a brothel.¹¹ Although we lack statistics for the numbers of slave prostitutes in any ancient society, at Roman Pompeii, at least, brothels were strikingly numerous for the size of the town.¹²

¹⁰ James Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes: The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), and Debra Hamel, *Trying Neaira: The True Story of a Courtesan's Scandalous Life in Ancient Greece* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

¹¹ Antiphon, *Accusation of Poisoning against the Step-Mother* in Antiphon and Andocides, *The Oratory of Classical Greece I*, trans. Michael Gagarin and Douglas M. MacDowell (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), sections 14–15.

¹² Thomas McGinn, *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World: A Study of Social History and the Brothel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

Even if sex was not their assigned role, all slave women were vulnerable to coerced sex with their masters – or members of their master’s families. The other tasks assigned to slaves often, but not always, reflected the sexual division of labor among the free. Women slaves cooked and cleaned within the houses of their masters. They took care of their master’s children and sometimes served as wet-nurses to them. Indeed, they could serve this function beyond their master’s house: from Egypt under the Roman Empire we possess a series of detailed contracts for wet-nursing services, including some involving rented slaves as wet-nurses.¹³ Most important, slave women made clothing, a crucial necessity and major commodity. In Athens for example, a wealthy woman’s main responsibility within the house was to oversee the weaving and spinning of the house’s slave women – and parallels from other cultures are abundant (see Fig. 4.3).

As important as the ways that slaves could contribute to the lifestyle of the rich was their function as a display of high status. Notables could give the impression of grandeur by appearing in public with a large escort of slaves, a common practice sometimes criticized in ancient Greece, Rome, and China as a sign of arrogance. Slaves could also serve as vehicles for further displays of wealth and class. For example, some Roman nobles dressed their slaves who appeared in public or who helped entertain guests in fancy, colorful livery.¹⁴ These functions of slavery fit better into the category of conspicuous consumption than economic profitability. Slaves could also help a noble showcase his religious piety and prowess: among the Maya, nobles and kings kept war captives for sacrifice to their gods – and sometimes cannibalism. In the interim between capture and death, which might last for many years, they were arguably slaves, but hardly productive economically.¹⁵

Some societies knew only these domestic and display uses of slavery. In developed urban economies, however, slaves produced craft items such as shields, sofas, clothing, pottery, and knives, and they performed services such as haircutting. The exact economic circumstances that led to the use of slaves in such niches are rarely known: the basic reason must lie in the greater availability and lower cost of slaves in comparison to free labor to fill a growing market for finished products and services. Such slavery presupposes a differentiated, market economy and often correlates with trade; for trade

13 Keith Bradley, “Sexual Regulations in Wet-Nursing Contracts from Roman Egypt,” *Klio* 62 (1980): 321–25.

14 Sandra R. Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman World* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 134–36.

15 David Freidel and Linda Schele, *A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), pp. 152–53 and 189–91.



Figure 4.3 A female domestic slave carrying a box of cosmetics, scene of female toilette from the Collection of Greek Vases by Mr. Le Comte de Lamburg (*Collection des vases grecs de Mr. le comte de Lamburg*), 1813–1824, by Alexandre de Laborde (1773–1842), Volume 11, Table 44 (Bibliothèque des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, France / De Agostini Picture Library / G. Dagli Orti / Bridgeman Images)

both increases the market for the finished products and provides a source of slaves. The use of slaves in craft production was common, for example, in Neo-Babylonia, Neo-Assyria, classical Athens and Rome.¹⁶ The employment of slaves in mining could be of even greater economic significance. For

¹⁶ Neo-Babylonia: Muhammad Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia: From Nabopolassar to Alexander the Great (626–331 BC)*, trans. Victoria Powell, rev. edn. (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984), pp. 279–307 and 512–19; H. D. Baker, “Degrees of Freedom: Slavery in Mid-First Millennium BC Babylonia,” *World Archaeology* 33 (2001): 23; Neo-Assyria: Gershon Galil, “The Lower Stratum Families in the Neo-Assyrian Period,” in Thomas Schneider (ed.), *Culture and History of the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), vol. xxvii, pp. 196–98; Greece: John K. Davies, *Wealth and the Power of Wealth in Classical Athens* (Salem, NH: The Ayer Company, 1984), pp. 41–43; Rome: Sandra R. Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), pp. 173–86.

example, silver was by far the most important export of classical Athens and the mines employed over 10,000 slaves as is clear from both their physical remains and a series of mine leases preserved on stone. Reportedly, four times that number toiled in the mines of Carthage's Spanish colonies.¹⁷

For the most part, slave societies used slaves in all the ways that societies with slaves did, but they also used them in large numbers in the dominant agricultural sector of the economy. So, in a slave society such as Rome, there were slaves in craft production, domestic service, and mining, all of these in addition to the masses of slaves on the large farms of elite Romans. A rough-and-ready rule is that variations in the extent of slavery made more difference to the social structure and culture of the society as a whole than in the experience of individual slaves. The life of a mine slave in Carthaginian Spain or at Athens, of a woman house-slave in Han Chang'an or at Rome, would have been similar.

There are exceptions to this rule of thumb, ways that slavery differed depending on its extent and importance. For example, David Turley argues "the social distance in slave societies between slaves and their master was more emphatically underlined than in most societies with slaves."¹⁸ To take just one example, masters in slave societies often perceived their slaves as threatening and instituted harsh punitive measures to repress them: for example, an infamous Roman law, the *Senatus Consultum Silanianum*, required that, if a slave killed his master, all the slaves in the household were to be executed. On one occasion the emperor Nero enforced this rule by ordering the execution of several hundred slaves belonging to the urban prefect of Rome, who had been murdered in his house, even though almost all of them were entirely innocent.¹⁹ The ruling classes of Saite Egypt, for example, with its small numbers of slaves would have felt no need for these sorts of measures designed to terrorize a large and threatening slave population.

The relative importance of slavery to a society is usually reflected in its culture: one cannot open any work of Roman literature, philosophy, history, or law, or look at its monuments without realizing that slavery permeated Roman culture. Most directly, the distinction between slave and free is likely to be central to the whole worldview of a slave society; this was perhaps most conspicuous in classical Athens where status distinctions between citizens were deliberately played down whereas the slave/free dichotomy was stressed. This ideology was connected in complex ways with the structure

17 Glenn E Markoe, *Phoenicians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p. 104.

18 Turley, *Slavery*, p. 63.

19 Tacitus, *Annals of Imperial Rome*, trans. Michael Grant (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), 14.42–45.

of the Athenian economy and the development of political equality among the citizens. In societies with slaves, slaves were often just one particular grade among many subordinate classes rather than a defining pivot of the whole social structure. For example, in the Spring and Autumn period, Chinese thinkers posited a rigid hierarchy of ten classes without prioritizing any one distinction such as that between slave and free.

A final point about slave societies is obvious: it is much easier to explain why a society possesses a few slaves rather than why it possesses so many slaves that the institution permeates its society. The widespread assumption that outsiders are inferior and do not have rights is enough to explain why moral opposition to slavery was rare. Slaves who performed household or sexual duties were a luxury; others displayed their owner's wealth and status. The desire of ruling classes for luxuries and display is familiar. But for a society to import slaves until they make up a substantial portion of its population requires a rare combination of political and economic causes. In many places, however, the development of cities, trade, empires, and the state contributed to the growth of slavery even when a full-blown slave society did not develop.

Trade, cities, and empires

Although this volume focuses on 1200 BCE – 900 CE as a world with states, empires, and networks, significant portions of the human race were at this time still organized in pre-state societies ranging from bands of hunter-gatherers through village societies to tribal societies and chiefdoms. Our evidence, however, for pre-state slavery in the ancient world is for the most part either terrible or nonexistent. For example, slavery among Northwest tribes in North America may have been similar in ancient times to what it was when anthropologists first studied these peoples: slaves provided little economic benefit, but were rather given away or simply killed at potlatch ceremonies.²⁰ Many languages in Africa have different words for “slave.” Historians have plausibly interpreted this diversity of nomenclature as evidence of the independent development of slavery in many places in Africa in the distant past.²¹ One working hypothesis, *faute de mieux*, would be that slavery among the peoples of the Northwest and Africa was similar a millennium earlier to how it appeared

20 Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p. 84; contra Leland Donald, *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

21 Paul E. Lovejoy, “Slavery in Africa,” in Gad Heuman and Trevor Burnard (eds.), *The Routledge History of Slavery* (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), pp. 35–36.

when our evidence begins. But the assumption that the distant past was unchanging just because it is unknown is optimistic at best. Somewhat more convincing are statistical surveys of large numbers of societies that show that slavery is rare among hunter-gatherers, is sometimes present in incipient agricultural societies, and then becomes common among societies with more advanced agriculture. Up to this point slavery seems to increase with increasing social and economic complexity.²² Fishing and especially pastoral societies are an exception to this developmental correlation in that they often have slavery.²³ On balance, pre-state societies probably acquired and used slaves in different ways than did states: in particular, economic motives played less of a role in pre-state slavery. In many such societies slavery mainly involved the abduction of women as sexual partners.²⁴

New World slavery was agricultural and can seem atavistic and primitive in comparison with contemporaneous industrialization with its wage laborers and technology. Whether or not this view was correct, slavery in the ancient world had its roots in quite the opposite phenomena: economic and social development, disruption and change contributed to slavery. Indeed, slavery often played the greatest role in the most dynamic societies. The spread and growth of cities resulted from the growth of economic specialization and of exchange. As the epicenters of such developments, cities provided a fertile environment for the employment of slaves in a wide variety of craft production and services for urban markets. In contrast, for much of the time, the agrarian countryside was organized according to long-developed relations of exploitation and dependence – some peasants sometimes remaining independent. These relations differed from place to place and sometimes changed over time but rarely involved chattel slavery. An economic niche for slave labor tended to develop in growing cities.

Urbanism is also associated with trade. Slaves were one of the first items of long-distance trade and continued to be a major component of trade for several reasons. Slaves are valuable. They can be transported by sea or they can be forced to walk whither they are needed – this last a great advantage shared only by livestock. Additionally, slaves were often one of the few things that less technologically advanced people could use to trade with their more

22 Nils-Petter Lagerlöf, "Slavery and Other Property Rights," *Review of Economic Studies* 76 (2007): 319–42.

23 Goody, "Slavery in Time and Space," pp. 25–26.

24 Catherine M. Cameron, "Captives and Cultural Change: Implications for Archaeology," *Current Anthropology* 52 (2011): 169–209.

developed neighbors. For example, archaeologists have found an extraordinary number of Republican Roman coins in Dacia (modern Romania): about 25,000 coins struck from 130 and 30 BCE. Michael Crawford argues persuasively that these coins came from Rome in exchange for Dacian slaves, perhaps to the tune of 30,000 per year.²⁵ Trade networks also greatly contributed to slavery. A thousand war captives could be reduced immediately to slavery in a neighboring district. This was difficult and dangerous, however, and the risk of flight was great. But if these same thousand captives were transported, sold, and dispersed hundreds or thousands of miles away in small groups or individually, among foreign peoples whose languages, customs, and even environments they do not understand, their subjection became quite practicable. In both Greek and Roman texts, we find the advice not to buy too many slaves from one place.²⁶ Such ethnic groups could be threatening; in contrast, an isolated and displaced slave was easier to control.

Trade networks – as well as large political entities, which also made long-distance displacement possible – made slavery an advantageous institution for ruling classes and victors in war. The existence of an active market in slaves meant that captives in war did not need to be either killed or carefully guarded and chained. Rather, they could be sold for money or traded for other valuable items. Ruling classes found sale to slave-traders attractive as a fate for political enemies and their families, criminals, debtors, rebels, and, in short, whomever they wanted to get rid of. These people could be dispatched without the possible stigma of killing a community member, without worry about their attempting to return, and with great profit.

Several trade routes characterized by active traffic in slaves became notorious well before the “triangular trade” of the modern Atlantic. Orlando Patterson has analyzed several of these and concluded that the Mediterranean in particular “from the viewpoint of human oppression has been a veritable vortex of horror for all mankind.”²⁷ The Indian Ocean also nurtured busy trade routes for

25 Michael Crawford, “Republican Denarii in Romania: The Suppression of Piracy and the Slave-Trade,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 67 (1977): 117–24.

26 Plato, “Laws,” in Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 6.777c–d; Aristotle, *Metaphysics: Books X–XIV, Oeconomica and Magna Moralia*, trans. G. Cyril Armstrong (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 1.5.6, 1344b; and Marcus Terentius Varro, *On Agriculture*, trans. William Davis Hooper, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 1.17.5

27 Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p. 171.

slaves.²⁸ These routes involved sea transport. This pattern is overdetermined, since the cheapest and easiest way to transport anything a long distance was by water. Less obvious are slave routes across deserts, such as the Saharan slave trade, well established many centuries before the Islamic conquests.²⁹ The explanation is best found in a feature that water and desert have in common: neither can be traversed without resources, knowledge, and organization – something a would-be fugitive slave would lack. So it is not just the ease of transport by water, but the way water separates that made sea transport important to the slave trade.

The empires that grew to prominence in our period provided an atmosphere conducive to slavery in several ways. Most directly, imperial wars often gave an extra boost to slavery on the supply side: war captives were enslaved by the armies of Assyria, Babylonia, Greece, China, Rome, and early Islamic dynasties – as well as New Kingdom Egypt before our period and the Incas after. Slaves could be the most valuable and liquid of the perquisites of victory. Two related phenomena are also crucial. First, conquest can both bring great wealth into a society and disrupt the traditional structure of its economy, in particular its agriculture. The case of the Roman Republic's dramatic expansion and development into a slave society makes the effect of this clear. Starting in the third century BCE, the Roman Republic fought intense and almost continuous wars and expanded from Italy to control the whole Mediterranean as well as huge inland tracts, including modern Spain, France, and Turkey. The direct enslavement as the result of these wars was huge; a single, short campaign in western Greece reportedly yielded 150,000 slaves.³⁰ Nevertheless, a study on the prices slaves paid for their freedom suggests that, paradoxically, slave prices were increasing during this period.³¹ And why did the Romans need to buy so many slaves from Dacia? The answer must be that conquest brought many slaves to Rome, but even more money. As a result Italy became far more urban and markets for produce grew. The frequent mobilization of large armies disrupted the countryside in Italy as peasants left for years at a time or never came back, a problem various

28 Gwyn Campbell, "Slavery in the Indian Ocean World," in Heuman and Burnard (eds.), *Routledge History of Slavery*, pp. 53 and 59.

29 Goody, "Slavery in Time and Space," p. 29.

30 Livy, *Rome and the Mediterranean*, repr. edn., trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2005) 45.34, and Polybius in Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, 7 vols., trans. Horace L. Jones, Loeb Classical Library (London: W. Heinemann, 1917–1933), 7.7.3.

31 Keith Hopkins and P. J. Roscoe, "Between Slavery and Freedom: On Freeing Slaves at Delphi," in Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves: Sociological Studies in Roman History* (Cambridge University Press, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 158–63.

reformers such as Tiberius Gracchus tried to address.³² New as well as old members of the Roman elite – as well as other Italians – aggressively took advantage of the situation by employing slaves on large farms and selling the produce in the new cities.³³ Roman Italy became a slave society in part as a result of economic and political disruption and opportunism and not simply as a result of mass enslavement in warfare.

A second phenomenon that contributed to slavery was the interaction of strong states with peripheral areas that were not directly conquered, but that lacked the organization to defend themselves from raids and whose internal wars may have been exacerbated by the slave market provided by its centralized and richer neighbors.³⁴ A recent study reveals that slaves were extremely cheap in classical Athens.³⁵ These low prices are most plausibly explained by the military advantages Greek city-states enjoyed and the geography of the greater Greek world, which consisted of Greek cities on the coasts of foreign lands throughout the Mediterranean and Black Sea. We hear of deliberate slaving expeditions setting out from these cities and can assume that many times as many raids went unreported in our sources.³⁶ These coastal cities also provided convenient and tempting slave markets for captives resulting from wars, raids, and civil disturbances among the inland peoples. Active trade by sea meant that a captive sold to a Greek city on the coast of the Black Sea, for example, might soon be for sale in Athens – and cheap. Circumstances, however, can give rise to an almost opposite pattern of slave raiding. For example, during the third through seventh centuries CE, the nomadic Saracens took advantage of their position in the Arabian desert, on the borders of the Persian Empire, the Roman (then Byzantine) Empire, and the Kingdom of Himyar, to prey on their larger and more centralized sedentary neighbors.³⁷

32 Keith Hopkins, "Conquerors and Slaves: The Impact of Conquering an Empire on the Political Economy of Italy," in Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, vol. 1, pp. 1–98. Contra: Willem Jongman, "Slavery and the Growth of Rome: The Transformation of Italy in the Second and First Centuries BCE," in Catherine Edwards and Greg Woolf (eds.), *Rome the Cosmopolis* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 100–22, and Walter Scheidel, "Human Mobility in Roman Italy II: The Slave Population," *Journal of Roman Studies* 95 (2005): 64–79.

33 Joseph C. Miller, "Slaving as a Historical Process: Examples from the Ancient Mediterranean and the Modern Atlantic," in Enrico Dal Lago and Constantina Katsari (eds.), *Slave Systems: Ancient and Modern* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 70–102.

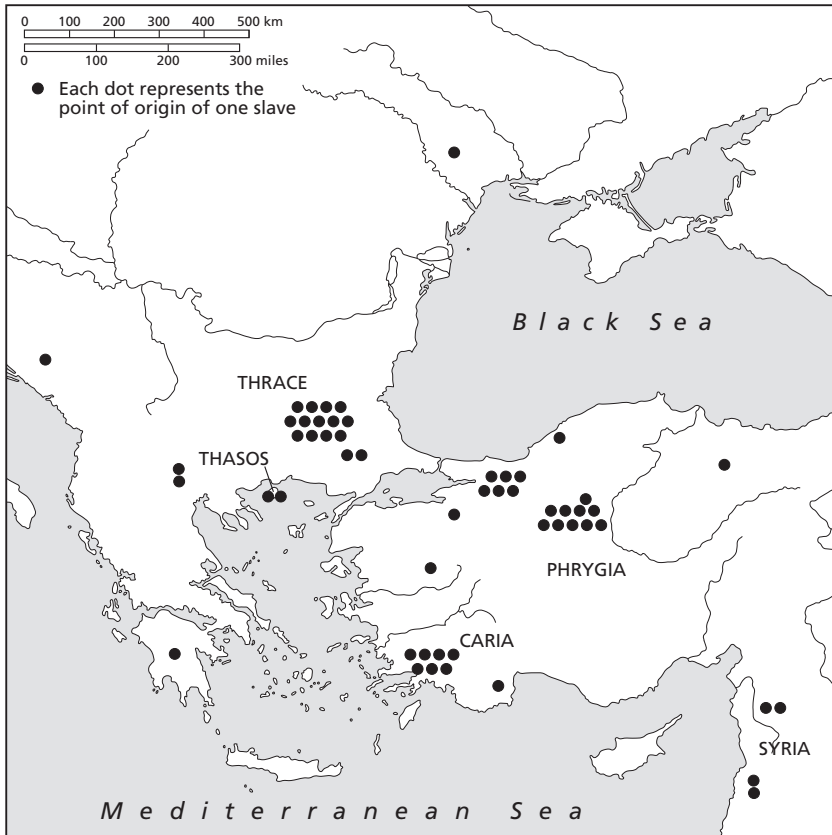
34 Goody, "Slavery in Time and Space," p. 24.

35 Walter Scheidel, "Real Slave Prices and the Relative Cost of Slave Labour in the Greco-Roman World," *Ancient Society* 35 (2005): 1–17.

36 Xenophon, *The Persian Expedition*, trans. Rex Warner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), VI.3.

37 Noel Lenski, "Captivity and Slavery among the Saracens in Late Antiquity (ca. 250–630 CE)," *Antiquité Tardive* 19 (2011): 237–66.

Slavery



Map 4.1 Probable places of origin of Athenian slaves (fifth and fourth centuries BCE)

States and slaves

The growth of state power, like the growth of cities, typically went hand in hand with the increasing inequalities both of wealth and power that produced an elite who might desire slaves for their lifestyle, status, or profit. In other ways too, the institutions of slavery and the state often, but not always, enjoyed a symbiotic relationship. A large-scale system of slavery requires the coercive backing provided by a strong state; in various ways, the state could use its power to profit from enslavement or to acquire slaves, both of which could provide an important addition to its power.

The state was a *sine qua non* for large concentrations of slaves. States promulgate laws; these usually confirmed property rights, and even early law

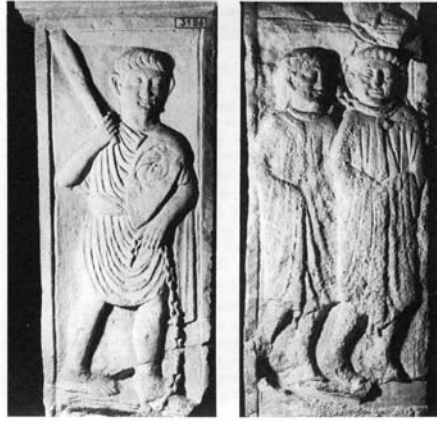


Figure 4.4 Roman soldier with chained prisoners (Landesmuseum Mainz)

codes confirmed the possession of humans: in fact, the earliest-known law code, from Sumer in 2100–2050 BCE, refers to legal problems pertinent to fugitive slaves.³⁸ Behind the law lay the state's superiority in the exercise of violence, which meant that slave owners could live among those they oppressed in relative safety, even when the number of slaves living in a noble's house reached seventy, a hundred, or even more, as it seems to have in Han China, Egypt, Babylonia, Greece, and Rome.

Ancient states directly enslaved people in consequence of two of their powers. First, the conduct of war was one of the first and most important prerogatives of the state. A state sometimes allowed soldiers or officers to appropriate booty, including slaves, but it could reserve such profits of war for itself in whole or part. Captives were sometimes auctioned off with the profits going to the treasury; in other cases, slaves were put to work directly for the state (see Fig. 4.4). A second state power was its ability to punish: in almost all ancient states, slavery was among the punishments that the state could inflict. In Rome criminals could be condemned *ad metallum*, to work in the mines. In Han China, condemned prisoners could be punished with labor for the rest of their lives – and there seem to have been large numbers of convicts. Their labor was flexible and permanent and thus more valuable than peasant *corvée* work.³⁹ In some periods of Chinese history, even the families of convicted and executed political criminals could be enslaved. In

³⁸ Goody, "Slavery in Time and Space," p. 18. ³⁹ Lewis, *Early Chinese Empires*, p. 215.

fact, E. G. Pulleybank argues that it was for this reason that the most common word for slaves came from the word for “child” and that in some periods even private slaves had their head shaved, wore a neck chain, and wore reddish brown clothing just as convicts did.⁴⁰ Such penal slaves belonged to the emperor, but they could be assigned to the service of other individuals.

Thus, through its control of war and punishment the state could become a major owner of slaves or profit from selling or otherwise granting control over the slaves in its possession. Sometimes a society’s upper classes thoroughly controlled the state, which acted in its interest. So, for example, the Chaldean king, Nabonidus, gave almost 3,000 prisoners of war to serve as slaves for several temples, a donation that was clearly a windfall for the priestly class there.⁴¹ In other cases, the ruler was, to a greater or lesser extent, in competition with the rest of the elite. In such cases, the direct control of slaves, or the profits from their sale, was an important resource for the state in its various power struggles and negotiations with the nobility. A Chinese variant highlights this issue. In 7 CE the emperor Wang Mang tried to ban slavery, but this reform raised too much resistance from his aristocracy and he had to give up the idea.⁴² This story implies first of all that in some periods China’s aristocracy depended more on slave labor on its estates than is usually assumed. Second, the possession of slaves was a resource that the emperor wanted to see limited. Presumably the state’s control of convicts and corvée labor was not in question and thus eliminating the chattel slavery upon which the aristocrats depended would have increased the relative power of the emperor.

In virtue of their social isolation from the rest of society, slaves have sometimes contributed directly to the power of the state or its ruler: the state could use slaves in military, police, and administrative roles. These may seem paradoxical uses of “generally dishonored” people, but are well attested. With the right system of discipline and perhaps the promise of reward, slaves can fight capably for a state against its external enemies, as cases from Greece, Rome, and the Muslim world show.⁴³ More important was their internal function. Slaves are deracinated and have no ties to elite

40 Pulleybank, “The Origins and Nature of Chattel Slavery in China,” 198 and 200–201.

41 Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia*, p. 472. 42 Lewis, *Early Chinese Empires*, pp. 23 and 69.

43 Peter Hunt, *Slaves, Warfare, and Ideology in the Greek Historians* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), and Christopher Leslie Brown and Phillip D. Morgan (eds.), *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

families within a state. Slave soldiers can thus provide a powerful weapon for monarchs fearful of their own nobles and distrustful of their people. An army recruited from foreign slaves gave monarchs an independent power base. Famous early cases come from the Abbasid dynasty starting in the ninth century.⁴⁴ Slave soldiers, recruited from among the Turks and often manumitted upon completion of their training, provided support for rulers plagued by worries about legitimacy and threatened by internal and external enemies. For example, the late-ninth-century *Kitāb al-buldān* of al Ya'qūbī relates the settlement of Turkic slave soldiers with land during the reign of the Caliph al Ma'mūn, 813–833 C.E. He emphasizes that the Turks were settled in separate towns from the local population and forbidden to intermarry; the Caliph bought slave women for them to marry and insisted that the slave soldiers' descendants should also be endogamous.⁴⁵ The biggest long-term threat to their isolation and thus complete dependency on the Caliph lay in their intermarriage after manumission with local peoples, since marriage was almost universally the cement of social alliance.

When it came to assistance with administration, rulers throughout history have often turned to a class of slaves whose familial isolation was biologically ensured: eunuchs. Eunuchs served Roman emperors, and this practice extended into the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic world. The practice finds parallels and antecedents in monarchies all over the Near East and other parts of the world: for example, the Chinese legalist reformer Shang Yang of the fourth century B.C.E. was criticized by the historian Sima Qian, c. 145–86 B.C.E., for getting his first important position due to the influence of a court eunuch.⁴⁶ Despite their power, eunuchs were paragons of slavery in that their biological condition prevented them from ever establishing family ties and, however powerful they may have been in relation to other people, their dependence on their master remained absolute.⁴⁷

Slaves served as government administrators in a wide range of contexts. Under the fifth- and fourth-century B.C.E. democracy, the Athenians insisted on the rotation of officials appointed by lot for a year only. State slaves, who served as secretaries and assistants to the officials, may have assured whatever continuity and professionalism was necessary to the smooth running of

44 Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), and Gordon, "Preliminary Remarks on Slaves," pp. 71–84.

45 Gordon, "Preliminary Remarks on Slaves," pp. 72–73.

46 Ssu-ma Ch'ien, "Biography of Shang Yang," in Li Yu-Ning (ed.), *Shang Yang's Reforms and State Control in China* (White Plains, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1977), pp. 104 and 110.

47 Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, pp. 314–31, and Keith Hopkins, "The Political Power of Eunuchs," in Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, pp. 172–96.

the government; they may have exercised considerable discretion and thus power behind the scenes.⁴⁸ In the early Roman Empire, slaves and ex-slaves of the emperor performed bureaucratic functions that required closer supervision and professionalism than a Roman noble could stomach. Several of these offices, filled by ex-slaves, were arguably the most important administrative posts in the realm.⁴⁹ Even average members of the thousands of slaves in the *familia caesaris*, the slaves and ex-slaves of the emperor, could look forward to marriage with freeborn women upon manumission and often even before.⁵⁰ To sum up, not only did the state provide a context in which slavery could flourish, but it also benefited greatly from slavery, sometimes to the advantage of the elite and sometimes in competition with it.

Into and out of slavery

The racism directed against black Africans in New World slave systems was a modern, relatively systematic, and extreme example of a much more common attitude toward slaves. This is the notion that the slaves are outsiders – for example, southern “barbarian” slaves in China from Han times till the ninth century CE⁵¹ – and as such have no rights to shield them from the harshest of treatment. A crucial property of slave systems, therefore, is the source of new slaves: whether the slaves are mostly foreigners reduced to slavery, are born into slavery, or are enslaved members of that society. Most historians believe that the last of these three sources, for people to be enslaved within their own society, is relatively rare. It is hard to sever ties with family, clans, and village without physically displacing a person. More important, perhaps, is that ruling classes have usually reduced their own lower classes to some sort of subjection: they have less motivation to destroy family and community ties and disrupt arrangements that already favor them.

There are certainly exceptions to this generalization. In addition to penal slavery, a widespread practice is for parents under the pressure of abject poverty to sell their children into slavery or for abandoned children to be raised as slaves. The former was arguably one of the main sources of slaves

48 Edward E. Cohen, *The Athenian Nation* (Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 130–54.

49 Henrik Mouritsen, *The Freedman in the Roman World* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 93–109.

50 P. R. C. Weaver, *Familia Caesaris: A Social Study of the Emperor's Freedmen and Slaves* (Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 112–36.

51 Pulleybank, “The Origins and Nature of Chattel Slavery in China,” 207.

during the Han Dynasty in China. William V. Harris argues that the raising of foundlings as slaves, a related practice, was one of the ways that the mature Roman Empire was able to replenish its supply of slaves.⁵² The raising of foundlings makes sense in that such children have not yet had birthrights acknowledged, so their natal alienation is something given rather than something that needs to be accomplished at a cost. The sale of young children may fall into a similar category. The “voluntary” sale by destitute parents made (horrible) sense in terms of natal alienation: who had a better right to abnegate children’s birth claims than their parents?

Poor people of any age could fall into slavery within their society through debt. Practices in different societies connecting debt with forced labor and slavery are complex, varied, and ubiquitous. In some societies, allowing people to pay off a debt with labor was simply one way that the elite extracted labor from the poor. Even if such debtors never paid off their debt but only the interest, they were not slaves, cut off from their families and place in society. In other cases, a man pledged himself or a family member as security for a debt. If the debt was not paid, then the creditor took possession of the person serving as collateral. At that point, the person could be sold anywhere and had become a slave. The obstacles to enslaving a person within their own society can be seen in the fact that slavery for debt, in contrast to the slavery of outsiders, was banned in many societies – though of course such protective laws were often circumvented.

Despite these categories of enslavement within a community, slaves who have been brought from abroad seem historically more common, especially where slave numbers are large. Their natal alienation was made easy by distance; they were, in fact, outsiders and thus easier to despise and dishonor. Some slave systems sustained themselves by the constant import of more slaves. This is particularly likely when foreign slaves were abundant – in warlike states – and when male slaves were preferentially imported for heavy labor. The latter practice results in an unequal sex ratio and thus reduces the possibility of the slave population reproducing itself. This was certainly the case with modern slavery in the Caribbean and Brazil; judging from the evidence we possess, classical Athenian and probably Roman slavery during

52 William V. Harris, “Towards a Study of the Roman Slave Trade,” *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 36 (1980): 117–40, and William V. Harris, “Geography and the Sources of Roman Slaves,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1999): 62–75. Contra: Walter Scheidel, “Quantifying the Sources of Slaves in the Early Roman Empire,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 87 (1997): 156–69.

the Republic were also dominated by male slaves.⁵³ In such circumstances we expect that many of the slaves were first-generation slaves imported from their native countries. This expectation is borne out by scattered evidence: for example, it could not be assumed that a slave at Athens could even speak Greek.

The larger the slave population and the more natural the sex ratio, the greater a role reproduction plays in its maintenance. Naturally our sources mention enslavement more than birth into slavery, but birth may be the main source of slaves for the most slaveholding societies.⁵⁴ On the one hand, born slaves were slaves from the beginning and they present none of the ideological problems of the transition from freedom to slavery. Aristotle, for example, worried that the nobly born might seem to be natural slaves if they happened to be captured in war – something he ended up denying.⁵⁵ On the other hand, born slaves were neither outsiders nor really foreign. Slave masters often insist on the intrinsic foreignness even of born slaves, but this becomes an increasingly ideological exercise; for example, slaves born at Athens would have Greek as their first language and, in much of the ancient world, there was no convenient marker such as skin color to help mark off slaves from the free. Ancient Jewish and Islamic laws display a religious twist to this ideology: Jewish law regarded foreign captives as chattel slaves, but instituted a variety of protections for enslaved Jews; Islamic law forbade the enslavement of Muslims, a law that encouraged slaves to convert, but was often circumvented.⁵⁶

Untold numbers of people suffered enslavement in the ancient world; some gained their freedom. Manumission is sometimes represented as a unique and mitigating aspect of ancient slave systems; it is rather that slavery in the American South, usually the unstated basis of comparison, was an exceptionally closed system. The case of Brazilian slavery, a more open system, also provides a warning against relying too much on manumission as an indicator of a “mild” slave system. Brazil’s ex-slaves were prominent in

53 W. Kendrick Pritchett and Anne Pippin, “The Attic Stelai, Part II,” *Hesperia* 25 (1956): 276; Harris, “Geography and the Sources of Roman Slaves,” 63; contra Ulrike Roth, *Thinking Tools: Agricultural Slavery between Evidence and Models* (London: Institute for Classical Studies, 2007), pp. 1–52.

54 Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p. 170.

55 Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeves (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1998), I.6, 1255a22–30.

56 Leviticus 25: 44–46; Exodus 21:2–6 with Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 2005), and David Forte, “Law, Islamic Law,” in Paul Finkelman and Joseph Calder Miller (eds.), *Macmillan Encyclopedia of World Slavery* (New York: Macmillan Reference, 1998).

its cities and created a vibrant culture there, but the sugar plantations of Brazil represented the nadir of slave experience with a mortality rate that would quickly have decimated the slave population without constant imports.⁵⁷ Ancient slaves often welcomed the opportunity of obtaining freedom. The chance of manumission, always at the master's discretion, also served the interests of masters in that it motivated their slaves to work hard. But not even in the best-attested case, that of Roman slavery, do we have a solid basis for estimating how large a proportion of slaves won their freedom. It was probably small.⁵⁸ At Rome manumitted slaves at least became citizens; in many societies, ex-slaves and even their descendants remained inferior or outside of mainstream society; at Athens they became *metics*, resident foreigners. In most of the ancient world, however, ex-slaves were not distinguished by permanent inheritable markings such as skin color. This meant that, although all the resources of class snobbery might still be arrayed against manumitted slaves and their descendants, their chance of social advancement was greater. Finally, we should not assume that the greater availability of manumission was always a good thing. As long as a slave system maintained itself and the number of slaves did not decline, the more slaves that were manumitted, the more free people needed to be reduced to slavery. This is not an abstract issue: high rates of manumission were in fact usually fostered by the easy and cheap availability of replacement slaves – at great human cost.

Conclusion

The way slaves entered and exited slavery is an important topic for understanding ancient systems of slavery. It is not, however, the only one. Historians investigate many other aspects of ancient slavery that we have not even been able to touch on: the possibility and nature of family or community life for slaves; the extent to which slaves maintained a sense of their birth cultures, assimilated their masters' culture, or did a bit of both; what protections if any did slaves enjoy; and how did slaves resist their oppression given that open revolt was rare and usually hopeless? These questions and others are sometimes hard to answer given our evidence. The answers, if found, often vary from one

57 Richard Follett, "Demography of Slavery," in Heuman and Burnard (eds.), *Routledge History of Slavery*, pp. 122–14; Katia M. de Queirós Mattoso, *To Be a Slave in Brazil: 1550–1888*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), pp. 177–212.

58 Thomas Wiedemann, "The Regularity of Manumission at Rome," *Classical Quarterly* 35 (1985): 162–75, and Scheidel, "Quantifying the Sources of Slaves," 167.

society to another, from Rome to Egypt, from the Abbasids to the Han – not to mention between modern and ancient slavery. Even more striking, perhaps, are the differences between slaves within the same society: at Rome, for example, between chained agricultural slaves and household accountants, between prostitutes and imperial administrators. Nevertheless, as defined by Patterson, slavery possesses enough unity, globally and across time, so that similar questions at least are appropriate. In our period, in many advanced states similar habits of thought and social and economic developments led to the reliance on slaves, a category of “outsiders within,” almost devoid of rights but extremely flexible when it came to their use.

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The Axial Age in world history

BJÖRN WITTROCK

In the course of the last half-century the interpretation of the first millennium BCE has come to occupy a prominent position not only in the fields of history and the history of religion but, increasingly, also in the humanities and social sciences more generally. One focal point in this development is the growing interest in the idea of the so-called Axial Age. The term, and the concept behind it, was formulated sharply in the wake of World War II by the philosopher Karl Jaspers in a small book with the title *The Origin and Goal of History*.¹

This book was one of the first systematic efforts by a leading European intellectual to outline a notion of history that explicitly rejected a Eurocentric or Christocentric account of world history. Jaspers pointed to the relatively simultaneous emergence of distinctly new modes of thought in several high cultures of the Old World in the centuries around the middle of the first millennium BCE. These new modes displayed a greater reflexivity that went decisively beyond those that characterized the kind of mythic thinking that in various forms had dominated earlier societies, whether tribal societies or large-scale Archaic societies. Thereby, they opened up new possibilities for humans to think critically not only about crafts and practical matters, but about cosmologies, rituals, and political practices, and also, indeed, about thoughts themselves and their presuppositions. Jaspers characterized the period from about 600 BCE to about 350 BCE – which he later extended to 800 to 200 BCE – as the *Achsenzeit*, using the German word *achse*, which means both axis and pivot.

Only with this type of “second-order thinking,” to paraphrase the late historian of science Yehuda Elkana, could humans transcend the limitations of their daily lives and of cosmological assumptions inherent in the rituals of

1 Karl Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* [*The Origin and Goal of History*] (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953).

their societies. Societies up until then had been characterized by mythical thinking that was reflected in rituals that were primarily designed to provide a sense of cohesion within a tribal or a larger Archaic society. In some of the high cultures, including that of China, rituals also aimed at securing coherence between the perfection of a celestial domain and the practices of humans in societies by bringing heavenly harmony to bear upon mundane reality. Ultimately, this was a matter of, to paraphrase the subtitle of a recent book, “Conforming Earth to Heaven.”²

Axial Age thought extended such ideas by making a sharper distinction between a transcendental and a mundane sphere and thereby enabling a more critical stance to mundane reality but also an examination of modes of thinking about this relationship. Benjamin Schwartz has given the sense of transcending and critically reflecting upon the given world that characterized the Axial Age a succinct formulation: “Whether one deals with the Upanishads, Buddhism, or Jainism in India, with the emergence of Greek philosophy or with the emergence of Confucianism, Taoism, and Mohism in China – one finds a kind of standing back and looking beyond, of questioning and reflexivity as well as the emergence of new perspectives and visions.”³

Interpreting the Axial Age

When Karl Jaspers introduced this thesis he did not do so *ex nihilo*. The term itself derived from Hegel, so Jaspers believed, erroneously as has later been demonstrated.⁴ Jaspers also referred to earlier works by Victor von Strauss and Ernst von Lassaulx and by his own contemporary and older colleague Alfred Weber. The authors of two conceptual historical essays on the Axial Age, Johann P. Arnason and Hans Joas, have somewhat different assessments of the relevance of these references.⁵ Their main point of divergence concerns Lassaulx, who in turn made references to predecessors. Whereas Hans Joas argues that Lassaulx (already in 1856) “clearly spells out the Axial

2 David Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China: Conforming Earth to Heaven* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

3 Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 3.

4 Hans Joas, “The Axial Debate as Religious Discourse,” in Robert N. Bellah and Hans Joas (eds.), *The Axial Age and Its Consequences* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 9–29.

5 Johann P. Arnason, “The Axial Age and Its Interpreters: Reopening a Debate,” in Johann P. Arnason, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, and Björn Wittrock (eds.), *Axial Civilizations and World History* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), vol. IV, pp. 19–49, and Joas, “Axial Age Debate,” p. 15.

Age thesis *avant la letter*,” Arnason finds the formulations quoted by Jaspers “unconvincing.” In the case of Alfred Weber, it seems clear that elements of the thesis of the Axial Age can be found, but not in a form that would require one to revise the view that it was indeed Karl Jaspers who formulated the thesis succinctly enough to make it amenable to a series of further and often more empirically orientated investigations.

Several authors, including Arnason, Joas, and S. N. Eisenstadt, have also discussed statements by Alfred Weber’s older brother Max Weber as of relevance in this context. Thus in his studies of the great world religions, Max Weber points to parallels between classical Greek and Indian thinking. However, this only occurs in a relatively brief passage, and Max Weber cannot be credited with having introduced a clear formulation of the Axial Age hypothesis. It has also been pointed out that in the second volume (1925) of Ernst Cassirer’s magnum opus in three volumes, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*,⁶ there is a discussion in its consideration of mythic thought that not only is compatible with what Jaspers writes later but also, in important respects, comes close to investigating precisely what Jaspers describes as a key element of the Axial Age, namely the transition from *Mythos* to *Logos*.⁷

Strauss, Lassaulx, both Webers, and Cassirer – and others such as Eric Voegelin – worked within broad traditions of scholarship with some common characteristics, including an interest in the historical dimensions of philosophical analysis, in the existential situation of humankind in historical perspective, and in exploring these fields with a combination of analytical and interpretive procedures. They were also interested in exploring linkages between history, philosophy, and religion across regions and across time. However, it still seems reasonable to take the publication of *The Origin and Goal of History* as the starting point for the engagement with the idea of the Axial Age that has become a vital component of modern historiography, humanistic scholarship, and social science.

In the 1970s, the Harvard sinologist Benjamin Schwartz and a group of prominent scholars, including Peter Brown, Louis Dumont, Eric Weil, and Arnaldo Momigliano, took up the notion of the Axial Age in a pathbreaking special issue of the journal *Daedalus*, devoted to the theme “Wisdom, Revelation, and Doubt: Perspectives on the First Millennium BC.”⁸ Several

6 Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* [*The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*] (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1955), vol. II.

7 Hans Joas, *A German Idea of Freedom? Cassirer and Troeltsch between Germany and the West* (Malmö: Swedish Ernst Cassirer Society, 2006), vol. II.

8 *Daedalus* 104 (1975), no. 2.

of them later published major works that further explored these ideas. However, the two scholars who probably have “done more than anyone to make the Axial Age significant for comparative historical sociology”⁹ are Shmuel N. Eisenstadt and Robert N. Bellah.

Together with the leading Weberian scholar Wolfgang Schluchter, Eisenstadt made it the focus of a sustained research program and, in collaboration with a large number of historians and linguists, extended the analysis considerably. Bellah and Eisenstadt represent different intellectual styles, but both of them have been crucial in transmitting to the scholarly community at large a strong sense of the intellectual urgency of the debates around the idea of the Axial Age. Through them, humanistic scholars in fields such as Egyptology, Assyriology, Sanskrit studies, history of religion, Sinology, and many others have come to gain respect for and an interest in historical social science. It is also due to Eisenstadt and Bellah that the idea of the Axial Age has more recently come to enter center stage in social science debates and theorizing, and has also emerged in the human and cognitive sciences, with theoretically orientated scholars such as Jürgen Habermas, Hans Joas, José Casanova, Merlin Donald, and Charles Taylor, deeply engaged in the dialogue about the Axial Age. This idea has been the subject of an increasingly intense but also increasingly well-informed debate, involving ancient historians, historians of religion and philosophy, and linguists.¹⁰

The significance of the Axial Age

The shifts that these and other scholars identified referred to new conceptualizations of temporality, agency, and sociality, but also of cosmology. In all areas where the new openness of thought characteristic of the Axial Age emerged, there were multiple competing conceptualizations and a variety of

9 Robert N. Bellah, “What is Axial about the Axial Age?” *European Journal of Sociology* 46 (2005): 69–89, here 76. This article gives an excellent and succinct statement of Bellah’s basic position and attests to his lasting contribution to the Axial Age debate.

10 This fact is most evident in the following publications all edited by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt: *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986); *Kulturen der Achsenzeit I: Ihre Ursprünge und ihre Vielfalt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987), parts 1 and 2; *Kulturen der Achsenzeit II: Ihre institutionelle und kulturelle Dynamik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), part 1; and in the already mentioned volume (co-edited with Wittrock), *Axial Civilizations and World History*. Robert N. Bellah’s magisterial works in this field in recent years are his monograph *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001) and his already mentioned volume (co-edited with Joas), *Axial Age*.

different schools of thought.¹¹ The carriers of these different schools tended to come from relatively marginal positions socially but often also spatially. At least for some periods of time, they enjoyed a relative autonomy from the centers of political power. However, eventually a crystallization of modes of thought relative to forms of political practice tended to emerge. In this process the openness of the original period of Axial breakthroughs became more constrained, rules of interpretations emerged, and groupings of officially sanctioned interpreters of Axial inscriptions were designated. These processes in turn contributed to the emergence of new forms of religious, cultural, and political practices but also to an enhancement of the potentials for trans-regional and trans-civilizational interactions and encounters. In this sense the Axial Age had implications for the course of world history far beyond the period that its original interpreters had identified as the centuries of its emergence (around the middle of the first millennium BCE), and it was extended to encompass the entire period 800–200 BCE.

Firstly, in the wake of the Axial Age, the great world religions emerged. Their religious practices tended to differ not only from those of tribal societies but also from those of large-scale Archaic societies. These early societies involved rule over extensive territories and often a hierarchical order where new rituals emerged and supplanted the rituals of tribal societies. The new rituals of Archaic societies tended to be performed within relatively small elite circles and involved an articulation of the role of the supreme ruler as embodying divine features. Inevitable societal misfortunes and catastrophic events could lead to cracks in the cosmology and practices of these early states as well as to elaborate processes of reinterpretation of myths, what some observers have termed mytho-speculation.

Secondly, these ecumenes were linked to new forms of political order. These forms differed fundamentally from those of tribal societies and Archaic societies, the crises of which served as an important background for the political, religious, and cultural contestations that crystallized in the Axial Age.

Perhaps the most important of the new forms of political order was that which rested on a new conception of empire. In the wake of the Axial Age, empires emerged that were premised on loyalties beyond membership in a circle of kin. Such empires cannot merely be described in terms of bureaucratic-political capacities to formulate autonomous goals and to

¹¹ This feature has been particularly emphasized by Ian Morris, *Why the West Rules – for Now: The Patterns of History, and What They Reveal about the Future* (New York: Picador, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2010), pp. 254–63.

mobilize resources for their implementation. They also have to be examined in terms of cultural programs that underpinned and gave legitimacy to their institutions and their practices in the fields of bureaucracy and violence.

Furthermore, Axial religious imaginations posited commonalities between humans beyond the limits of tribal and Archaic societies. Thus, the Axial Age created new religious ecumenes that encompassed and linked human beings across vast distances. These ecumenes entailed the emergence of trans-local and trans-regional commonalities in terms of conceptions of time, cosmology, and notions of belonging and allegiance among humans.

Linkages between political orders and religious practices developed differently in different cultures of the Old World. Thus in the Chinese context, with a prevalence of non-Deistic religious-philosophical practices, in particular those designated by terms such as Confucianism, Daoism, and later Buddhism, there were strong linkages between imperial order and religious practices.¹² However, at most points such linkages were not seen to entail a need for the political suppression of the exercise of any of these, nor of other religious-philosophical practices either, including those associated with Deistic religions transposed to the Chinese context. In other contexts, however, there were tendencies toward the emergence of a one-to-one relationship between religious practices and political order to the exclusion of alternative practices. In the Iranian world both the Achaemenid and, much later, the Sasanian Empire seem to be cases in point, although both of them also displayed toleration of a number of religious practices other than those most closely associated with and favored by the imperial courts.

The new imperial political orders could be greatly strengthened through an association with Axial religions and their ecumenes. Such an association tended to allow for an extension of empires. It meant that empires could mobilize new sources of legitimacy to support their standing and to reward loyal service.

Axial transformations entailed that imperial rule became premised on a different relationship between the ruler and the divine. Kings and emperors

12 Three fascinating works on the early imaginations of State and Empire in China are Michael J. Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates Concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China* (Stanford University Press, 2001); Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought: Intellectual Life in the Chunqiu Period, 722–453 BCE* (Honolulu: Hawai'i University Press, 2002); and Yuri Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Era* (Honolulu: Hawai'i University Press, 2009). See also Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 BC* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), and David W. Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China: Conforming Earth to Heaven* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

might rule with a mandate of heaven or the grace of God but, in contrast to the situation in some Archaic societies, rulers in Axial civilizations could not claim to actually be gods. Furthermore, processes of inscription of cosmologies in authorized texts meant that these texts opened up the possibility of different, possibly heterodox, interpretations. Even if efforts were made to standardize rules of interpretation and to reserve them for a circle of authorized mediators, the possibility of heterodoxy and dissent was an inherent property of Axial Age religions. This opened up the possibility for social and political dissent and brought with it the possibility that challenges would be underpinned by convictions of divine or celestial legitimacy.

Thirdly, the new imperial orders helped further regional and trans-regional trade networks. They also directly contributed to the establishment of trade routes. There might, for instance, have been overland contacts between Europe and China as early as the beginning of the second millennium BCE. However, it is only with the creation of a centralized Chinese empire in 221 BCE, after the long period of turbulence known as the Warring States period, that conditions were established that were conducive to the growth of interregional trade networks. Most famous of these, effectively shaped in the time of the Han Dynasty, is the network of such trade routes that in the nineteenth century was given the name “the Silk Road” denoting a network of interlinked overland routes connecting the Eastern Mediterranean area with central China.

Analogous developments, if on a somewhat more limited scale, occurred within the Roman Empire and beyond its borders. Extensive maritime networks also emerged linking areas around the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean in commercial but also cultural interaction. Thus, the hypothesis of the Axial Age has served as a focal point for efforts to link some of the most profound transformations that originated in the first millennium BCE and that came to have repercussions for much of ensuing history.

We may speak of multiple Axial civilizations, each, however, characterized, at least initially, by a variety of contending schools of thought, which emerge in the first millennium BCE. Profound differences emerged among these various paths of development and the cultural and institutional legacies that became the dominant ones in different areas of the Old World, from that of Greek city-states in the classical period and of Jewish life in the prophetic age in the West to that of China in the East.

In some of these cases, there was a close relationship between religion and imperial rule, most clearly, perhaps, in the different Iranian dynasties already

from the Achaemenids, and in China during the Qin and Han dynasties.¹³ Perhaps something similar might be asserted about the Mauryan Empire during the reign of Ashoka. However, for most of historical time there has been no easy correspondence between religious-philosophical practices and political practices within imperial orders.¹⁴

Greek philosophical-religious discourse of the classical period must be seen in the context of the specific form of political practice provided by the multiplicity of city-states. Jewish religious and political life in the Hellenistic and later in the Roman era took place against the background of externally imposed rule or of domestic rulers acting on behalf of, or within the constraints of, external powers. Despite this variety, it is still meaningful to take the Axial transformations as an important reference point in the analysis of subsequent developments.

Conditions and causes of the Axial Age

In Jaspers' account the key regions that he identified with the origins of the Axial Age in the centuries around the middle of the first millennium BCE were the major civilizations of the Eastern Mediterranean, the Near East, and South and East Asia. This raises the question of whether it is possible to outline a comparative framework that may account for the cultural and societal transformations of the Axial Age across the different civilizations in which it emerged. A first important issue concerns the conditions and causes of the Axial transformations.

First of all it should be noted that some of the terminology employed in discussions of the Axial Age may risk concealing an important question, namely that of continuities. Thus in China, Greece, and the Near East, a key factor behind the dramatic increase in reflexivity and critical discussion may have been precisely the breakdown of the established practices and assumptions prevailing in earlier civilizations. Whether we look at Egypt, Greece, Mesopotamia, or China during the Shang and Zhou empires, these civilizations clearly do not, to quote an expression used by Jaspers to characterize pre-Axial societies, fall "outside of history." On the contrary, Axial transformations involved significant continuities relative to these earlier civilizations.

13 See Michael Loewe and Denis Twitchett (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), vol. 1, but also Mark Edward Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

14 See Romila Thapar, *History and Beyond* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Literati and philosophers in the Axial Age often tried to spell out an imagined legacy of their own societies and civilizations, and their own linguistic strategies and conceptual innovations often involved the generalization of key characteristics in their interpretations of these traditions. Thus, the Confucian ethic is not a completely new conceptualization, but rather an articulation of a tradition, synthetic in its own ways, and the universalization of some of the most important virtues that had traditionally been seen as limited to aristocratic strata. In this case, as in several others, Axial thought is a reaction to a new type of human condition where neither the structures of kinship and physical proximity, nor those of a self-legitimizing empire suffice any longer to embed the individual in a context of meaning and familiarity.

In this context some observations can be made concerning the background of the Axial Age transformations. Firstly, these transformations had as their background not tribal societies but the early states of Archaic societies, that is, forms of political and cultural order with considerable spatial extension and with highly regulated forms of elite ritual linked to the center of political power.

Secondly, because of the extensiveness and centralization of political power and of cults and rituals linked to the center, there were inevitable and recurring strains and tensions that in themselves tended to engender conditions that were propitious for the kind of deep-seated changes that the Axial transformations involved. Furthermore, some of the most powerful early states came to impinge upon and pose a threat to a range of neighboring societies. The Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian states are obvious examples, as is the Achaemenid (First Persian) Empire founded by Cyrus the Great in the sixth century BCE, the largest political entity to that time. In the Chinese case, the threat to life as it was known was related to nomadic incursions, although these were less extensive than they would be later. Nevertheless, Axial thought in China was at least to some extent a reaction to a breakdown of political order, including upheavals and civil wars in the wake of the downfall of the Zhou Dynasty and the threat this posed to orderly, civilized life.

Thirdly, the Axial transformations were initiated and had their intellectual source of inspiration and articulation in sites outside of the direct political center, but where there was awareness of activities in the political center. These sites were peripheral enough to allow for a stratum of interpreters who could elaborate alternative cosmologies or ideas of practices in some degree of autonomy from the center. Eisenstadt, in particular, has emphasized the crucial role of the interpreters or the carriers, the "Träger," of a new worldview.

Fourthly, as already mentioned, the Axial Age was related to the emergence and diffusion of the great world religions. It seems undeniable that the intellectual and ontological shift, described in terms of a breakthrough, has important links to deep-seated shifts in religious practices. It is also clear, however, that the exact nature of such links is in many cases open to different interpretations. The great world religions had their origins in the Axial Age, and subsequent religious revelations and visions and their textual inscription, codification, and the religious movements they gave rise to had the Axial breakthroughs as a necessary background. It is also true that many previous forms of ritualistic practice were continued in religious practice after the Axial breakthroughs, though in a different guise. Furthermore, in the core epoch of transformation, the fact that the most important proponents of the transformations had a peripheral and heterodox position vis-à-vis mainstream cultural and political order led to an opening of horizons and the emergence of a variety of critical voices. Eventually, however, the Axial ruptures were given a standardized form and became more or less closely tied to new political centers and to new cultural-religious orthodoxies. However, there still remained the potential for the emergence of new heterodox interpretations that could rapidly take the form of a serious threat to central political power, no matter how closely linked the clerical and religious interpreters had become to that center.

There seem to be three key sets of conditions for the emergence of the Axial Age and possibly also for other periods in history of deep-seated change or what may be labeled periods of cultural crystallization. The first are the simultaneously destabilizing and enabling conditions inherent in new economic opportunities and in the introduction of new technologies. In the Axial Age such changes were often related to the introduction of tools and weapons based on iron production that eventually resulted in economic, agricultural, urban, and population growth – but also in warfare of a more violent nature with more pervasive consequences. Changes of these types have historically tended to exert a powerful pressure in the direction of new forms of social organization, including forms of inheritance, ownership, and production.

A second set of conditions involves the existence or at least widespread perceptions of political crisis or even crisis of civilized life itself. This may, to some extent, have to do with civil strife and conflict but also with imminent external threats. However, the conjunction of economic-technological opportunities and of acute political and societal crisis will not by themselves give rise to a profound rethinking that may open up fundamentally new institutional pathways.

This rethinking depends on a third set of conditions, the existence of fora and arenas where interpreters of new ideas may elaborate and articulate these ideas. There must be both a stratum of literati and some degree of autonomy from central political power for a significant segment of this stratum of literati.

Conceptualizing the Axial Age

In his recent magnum opus *Religion as Human Evolution*, Robert Bellah comes close to arguing that these conditions were indeed fulfilled, if in different ways and to different degrees, in the cases of ancient Greece, ancient Israel, and ancient China, and plausibly also in the case of India. (Bellah refrains from analyzing the fifth “classical” case of an original Axial transformation – Iran – with reference to the paucity and uncertainty of source materials.)

Inspired by the evolutionary and cognitive perspective of Merlin Donald, Bellah also emphasizes that the Axial Age is expressive of the possibilities that opened up to humankind at the time of the emergence of a fourth evolutionary stage in the development of human culture.¹⁵ In this evolutionary scheme, the earliest forms of human interaction are the so-called episodic culture, the second stage is mimetic culture, and the third stage is mythic culture, made possible by the development of language and the possibility of constructing “a unified, collectively held system of explanatory and regulatory metaphors,” a “comprehensive modeling of the entire human universe.”¹⁶ The Axial Age represents the beginning of the fourth fundamental stage, the so-called theoretic age, that allows for a new type of critically reflexive activities complementing those of bodily reactions and mimetic imitation and gesturing, and those of mythical narratives. Bellah also argues that this four-stage perspective serves as a means of avoiding teleological reasoning because the evolution can happen within one culture and there is no need to privilege any one of the five cases as being the precursor; nor is there a need to construe a genealogy or to establish streams of influence and borrowing. This is a convincing argument as far as the four or five original cases of Axial breakthroughs are concerned, but it seems less clear how an evolutionary perspective can help explain developments once the original Axial qualitative changes have taken place.

¹⁵ Merlin Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind: Three Stages in the Evolution of Culture and Cognition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 214.

¹⁶ Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind*, p. 214.

As to the substantive core of Axial thought, Jaspers and, even more so, later interpreters such as Bellah and Eisenstadt and their collaborators and colleagues, have recognized the complexity and sophistication of the many narrative accounts in the form of myths, the rituals associated with such myths, and the multiple forms of Axial thought. However, Jaspers also argued that a distinctive feature of the Axial Age was the emergence of forms of thought that involved not only transpositions and variations of mythical narratives, but also new forms of thinking that clearly transcended the limits of existing practices of human society. Thus, Bellah and others emphasize that the Axial Age involved the emergence of a distinction between narrative and analytical accounts. Thereby humans are not only able to give expression to visions and ideas of the world beyond the constraints of existence at a specific time and place, but also to take a critical and analytically orientated stance toward both material and intellectual practices and beliefs. Already for Jaspers, this change marked the transition from *mythos* to *logos*, a breakthrough in critical reflection, and indeed the emergence of history in the sense of the epoch in human existence characterized by a reflexive, historical consciousness.

In earlier tribal societies, the invocation and articulation of mythical beliefs in ritualistic practices would normally serve the social and cultural coherence of a collective. Such rituals would, of course, involve practices outside of the bounds of day-to-day practices of production and reproduction. They might also involve or usher in changes in the collective life of a community. In this way, myths could be reinterpreted and supplanted or even replaced by additional myths, as could notions of the primacy of different forces or divinities associated with the different forms of myths. However, such changes are only a question of continuation or partial adaption, not yet of a critical reflection nor of a rejection of some myths by way of questioning their premises or engaging in a comparative exposition of their merits and shortcomings in a, say, Aristotelian, dialogical form. This questioning started only in some societies in the Old World around the middle of the first millennium BCE. This change is profound enough to justify the designation Axial Age and the identification of those civilizations where this first occurred as Axial.

We may perhaps summarize by stating that Jaspers' position rested on the assumption that in the centuries around the middle of the first millennium BCE a major intellectual and institutional shift occurred in some of the high cultures in the Eurasian hemisphere. The breakthrough was manifested in different ways in different civilizations. However, in all forms it involved

a textual articulation of increasing human reflexivity and *reflexive consciousness*, and the ability to use reason to transcend the immediately given. This reflexivity was manifested in four major dimensions:

- Firstly, an elaboration of more reflective cosmologies, often in terms of positing a more or less fundamental and discursively argued separation between a *mundane* and a *transcendental sphere*. This also involved an *articulation* and *interpretation* of such cosmologies in terms of their oral mediation as well as their textual *inscription*, and the emergence of a set of rules for the authoritative interpretation of such texts.
- Secondly, the articulation and inscription of an increasing *historical consciousness*, an awareness of the temporal location and the limitations of human existence and thereby a sense of relative contingency.
- Thirdly, new conceptualizations of social bonds and connectedness, i.e., notions of what might be called *sociality*.
- Fourthly, an increasing awareness of the *malleability* of human existence, of the potentials of *human action* within the bounds of the mundane and temporal.

This change made possible a set of different institutional paths of development of lasting importance. For all the contestations about historical accounts, such a delimitation of the notion of the Axial Age provides a fruitful starting point for a study of its relevance in world history.

Consequences and pathways of the Axial Age

The Axial Age is a meaningful name for an important epoch in world history. It is not the only epoch that has involved profound shifts in cultural and institutional forms, but it is one of the most consequential cultural crystallizations before the Common Era, if not the most consequential one. The transformations in the Axial Age gave rise to at least five distinctly different paths of transformations linking cultural and cosmological shifts to institutional transformations, however, none of which should be given preferred empirical or normative status. This does not mean that we should think of these different trajectories as closed cultural systems. On the contrary, they depended on and gave rise to intensified cultural encounters and interactions on a trans-regional scale. All of them were also characterized by a multiplicity of voices and underwent constant and sometimes dramatic contestations and transmutations. Still, it may make sense to outline in schematic form some of the key characteristics of the institutional and cultural patterns that

emerged in the Axial Age, as long as we keep in mind that in all five cases there was a multiplicity of contending voices and interpreters and a wide range of philosophical and religious articulations. However, the eventual outcomes in institutional terms were distinctly different.

Firstly, there is the development in the Near East whereby, in a complex process of influence and juxtaposition, the Mosaic distinction (to use Jan Assmann's terminology) between true and false in religion and, as a consequence, a distinction between religion and politics was drawn in ancient Israel (but not, despite several preparatory steps, in ancient Egypt). Eventually, this distinction, in the prophetic age and in second temple Judaism, gave rise to a path of development that may be termed transcendental-interpretative.

Significant elements included processes of textual inscription and standardization, as well as interpretive contestation and the interplay between carriers of orthodoxy and heterodoxy. The participants in these contestations exhibited remarkable independence from political powers. Sometimes this led to a withdrawal from political power, but more often their activities impinged upon the world of rulership, sometimes explicitly, sometimes inadvertently, sometimes as heterodox dissent or even rebellion, and sometimes as support for established power.

Secondly, there is a related path, fundamentally influenced by Near Eastern developments, but in key respects distinctly different. This tradition gradually emerged in the Greek world and may be termed a philosophical-political path of development. It involved contestation and deliberation that exhibited intense concern about human potentials and action and the location of human beings in history, and constant reflection on the human condition. In this case, a clear distinction between a transcendental and a mundane sphere, absolutely central to the transcendental-interpretive tradition, is relatively insignificant. There is no standardized religious cosmology inscribed in codified texts. Instead, contestation is dialogical, if often textually transmitted, and has a philosophical and largely pragmatic character with regard to the political and moral life of a given community, a *polis*, as an inevitable reference point. The key protagonists in these contestations act in a context that was characterized by a previously unknown combination of intellectual independence, institutional autonomy, and political engagement.

Thirdly, there is the particular Chinese path that involved, at least from a period a millennium earlier than the Axial Age proper, the gradual merging and synthesis of different regional ritualistic practices and political orders in a broad cultural tradition that may be termed universal-inclusive. Key features of the cultural and political orders were clearly articulated hundreds of

years before the Axial Age. In some respects, Confucius, Mozi, and later Mencius and the legalists – for all their profound differences – wrote against the background of a perceived loss of cohesion in, or indeed the demise of, this earlier order, and they sought a renewed articulation of it. Cultural and scientific developments can and have been described as stepwise shifts, but they exhibit important ruptures and advances in the period of the Axial Age, as do certain aspects of political and social thought that showed a renewed emphasis on tradition, history, and human agency.¹⁷

A fundamental feature of this path is its universal-inclusive nature, but it is at the same time characterized by a high degree of contingency even in the political sphere. Thus already in pre-Axial Zhou political thought, the Mandate of Heaven transfers ultimate legitimacy to political order. However, it is a revocable mandate, and improper conduct is incompatible with the maintenance of this mandate. Therefore, heavenly sanctioned imperial rule is nonetheless contingent and open to doubt, critique, and potentially revolt. Similarly, there is a synthetic cultural order composed of highly different original traditions, some of which may perhaps best be understood as forms of moral philosophy, and two of which, Confucianism and Daoism, have only limited concern for a distinction between transcendental and mundane spheres. Precisely for this reason the universal-inclusive path of the Chinese world allows for and involves constant philosophical contestation between different traditions. In a sense, a Mosaic distinction need not be drawn in this Chinese context, where the relationship between political and religious order was always more open-ended than it was in the early polities of Egypt and Mesopotamia.

Fourthly, in India early Buddhism constituted an Axial challenge to Vedic religion. This challenge involved a focus on history and agentiality, through a process of semantic appropriation, transvaluation, and contestation. It thereby brought out the potentials of a critical stance toward what were no longer semi-naturalistic practices but rather conventions that could be transgressed.

It is precisely in reaction to this challenge that an articulation of Vedic religion occurred. The Indic world of Vedic religion may have been distinctly non-Axial, but Vedic religion could not avoid an engagement with the cultural systems that grew out of the early Axial transformations. Whereas

17 Christoph Harbsmeier, "The Axial Millennium in China: A Brief Survey," in Arnason, Eisenstadt, and Wittrock (eds.), *Axial Civilizations*, pp. 469–507, and Hsu Cho-yun, "Rethinking the Axial Age: The Case of Chinese Culture," in Arnason, Eisenstadt, and Wittrock, *Axial Civilizations*, pp. 451–67.

the philosophical-political axiality of Greece and the universal-inclusive axiality of the Chinese world had political order as its explicit or implicit centre of attention, the political implications of the Indic path – let us call it pluralistic-semantic – largely remained potential or entirely contingent (with the possible exception of the Mauryan Empire under Ashoka).

Fifthly, the geographical and political space where all of the major traditions of Eurasia actually interacted is the area of the Achaemenid Empire of Persia and its Hellenistic and Iranian successors. In many ways, cultural traditions in the Iranian lands came to serve as direct or indirect sources of inspiration for several of the world religions and imperial orders. However, knowledge of key aspects of religious and even political practices in the Achaemenid Empire is lacking. Nevertheless, the path of development in the Iranian lands may perhaps be termed one of a dualistic-agential tradition, where the relationship between political and religious order is seen as one of mutual dependence and close interaction, where there is a distinction between a transcendental and a mundane sphere, but where the battles within these spheres have implications for all actions in the mundane sphere.

It is a tradition with an articulated cosmology, but in its dualistic conceptualization, this cosmology differs fundamentally from the cosmology of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The cosmological distinction between a transcendental and a mundane sphere is consistent with a strong this-worldly orientation of practical engagement and action in the realm of political order. The relationship of the main intellectual-religious carriers of this cosmology to political power is characterized by proximity and reciprocal dependence. As in other forms of axiality, there are also forms of heterodoxy and dissent. However, on the whole, there is a more explicit and direct link to imperial power here than found along the other paths of axiality.

The Achaemenid Empire came to exert a far-reaching influence on later types of imperial orders in the region of the Mediterranean and the Near East, and in the first millennium CE, the Sasanian Empire saw itself as the legitimate heir of the Achaemenid Empire. Indirectly, there was also an influence on the nature of the Byzantine Empire, for half a millennium the main competitor of the Sasanian Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean and Near Eastern region. Despite its Hellenistic, urban, and Christian legacy and the fact that it was structurally different from the Sasanian Empire, the Byzantine Empire came from the seventh century onwards increasingly to exhibit features reminiscent of the Iranian imperial model. This was so in terms of changes in military-territorial organization but also in a gradual change in relationships between political and religious orders.

The Achaemenid Empire was the first imperial political order premised on an Axial cosmology and that involved a close reciprocal – but not symmetric – relationship between leading representatives of the political and the cosmological-religious orders. The long-term effects of this on the Sasanian Empire and on the successor of that empire, namely the new Islamic political order as it emerged with the establishment of the Abbasid Caliphate, is a fascinating and still not fully explored field of research.

As was the case with the Roman Empire, the Achaemenid Empire was characterized by tolerance toward minority cultures and languages. In contrast to the Roman Empire, however, it did not engage in efforts to promote the language of the rulers, that is, Old Persian, relative to the language of other peoples of the empire. However, the Iranian empires, as well as the classical Roman Empire, involved elements of, to use Sheldon Pollock's expression, *ethno-transcendence*, that is, the assignment of a crucial place in the imperial project to an ethnically defined people linked both to the temporal extension of empire and to its divine protection.¹⁸

Both the Roman and Iranian imperial patterns are distinctly different from that of India, but also from the cultural-political order of ancient Israel and ancient Greece during the early Axial transformations – and of course also from that of non-Roman and non-Axial Europe. In both ancient Greece and ancient Israel, the position of the intellectual carriers of interpretive elaborations was characterized by greater independence relative to the holders of political power. This is one reason why it would be erroneous to assume a necessary relationship between Axial thought and imperial order. One may indeed argue that the post-Axial imperial orders, while often embracing a cosmology of Axial origins, often involved severe institutional constraints and a reduction in intellectual autonomy for the carriers of Axial thought.

We may summarize some of the points above in Table 5.1, which for all its simplifications highlights three conclusions discussed above.

Firstly, a qualitative increase in reflexivity, historical consciousness, sociality, and agency is characteristic of the Axial Age. This is the precondition for the distinction between political order and religious-cultural order and hence for the possibility of a challenge to the legitimacy of political order or, to paraphrase Jan Assmann: "Kings can no longer claim to be gods." Once this possibility has been conceptually permitted, it is a potential that can never be

¹⁸ See Sheldon Pollock, "Axialism and Empire," in Arnason, Eisenstadt, and Wittrock (eds.), *Axial Civilizations*, pp. 397–450.

Table 5.1 Five paths of axiality

Region of emergence	Cultural-cosmological focus	Relation to political power	Ethno-linguistic force
Ancient Israel	transcendental-interpretative	strong independence	autonomous
Greece	philosophical-political	strong independence	weakly ecumenical
China	universal-inclusive	weak dependence	strongly ecumenical
India	pluralistic-semantic	strong independence	weakly ecumenical
Iran	dualistic-agential	strong dependence	ethno-transcendence cum linguistic pluralism

“unthought,” that is, the potential of a fundamental challenge to established order can never again be permanently removed.

Secondly, the institutional position of the interpreters of a given cultural-religious cosmology determines whether the potentials of the increased reflexivity may be realized or not. Within each of the five Axial paths, there was always an interplay between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, and there were always contending articulations of a given cultural-cosmological order. Often, as in the cases of India and China, there was also contention between deeply different cosmologies.

Thirdly, there is a complex interplay between three broad sets of factors that determine and release the potentials of a cultural crystallization: a deep-seated political and cultural crisis that was an imminent threat to the survival of a culture and its political manifestation; a surge of economic opportunities and potentials of growth; and the creation of arenas of articulation and interpretation with a relative distance and independence from immediate subjugation and subservience to political power.

There are also fundamental differences in terms of the ethno-linguistic force of the different Axial paths. From the perspective of our own age, the study of the wide range of such experiences in the Axial Age cannot but contribute to an enrichment of modern social and political thought.

The idea of the Axial Age has been conducive to high-level scholarship that reaches across time, region, and discipline. It is likely to continue to stimulate such research and to serve as one of the most significant sites for inquiries

about the human condition in world history, and also in the contemporary world.¹⁹

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19 One example of the relevance of the Axial Age for efforts to reach an understanding of our contemporary age is Charles Taylor’s magisterial work *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

Developments in science and technology

c. 800 BCE – c. 800 CE

HELMUTH SCHNEIDER

Knowledge of and mastery over nature are crucial factors in human history. What resources a society can command to realize its goals depends in large measure on how it can use the natural environment to produce and distribute food and goods. The Neolithic Revolution set in motion a development whereby humans influenced their environment on an ever larger scale in order to meet their need for nutrition and material goods. In Egypt and Mesopotamia in the third and second millennia BCE, the natural conditions of the large river valleys contributed to the rise of civilizations with the economic and cultural capacity to provide humans with goods far beyond the necessities of life, and, moreover, to give expression to religious beliefs and notions of power and distinction in the furnishings of their tomb complexes and in the building of monumental temples and palaces. This presupposed a mastery of fundamental cultural technologies: beginning in the third millennium BCE, both Egypt and Mesopotamia possessed writing, numbers and mathematical knowledge, the calendar, and an astronomy capable of recording the movement of the heavenly bodies. Agricultural technology, in turn, had advanced to the point where a sizeable group of humans was freed from the necessity of producing food and could thus devote itself to other community tasks.

The history of human knowledge about nature can in no way be understood merely as an expanding collection of discrete facts. At all times it is important to clarify how and with what intentions knowledge about nature was acquired, how this knowledge was embedded in the ensemble of religion, culture, and power, and how it was used to gain advantages in the struggle for power and distinction. Knowledge – and this applies also to knowledge of nature – can be expanded and increased in a variety of ways: it may find wider dissemination within a society or beyond the boundaries of a civilization when other societies adopt it and develop it further; it can become reflected in methodology and thereby secured for the future; and

it can open up, describe, and explain previously unknown facts. Knowledge can be handed down to subsequent generations through the oral transmission of experiences and information; and the use of writing creates the precondition for storing knowledge as text and transmitting it independent of personal contacts.

The long centuries between c. 800 BCE and c. 800 CE do not constitute a uniform era in human history. Greece in the Archaic Period (800–500 BCE) saw the emergence of the system of free and autonomous cities, the *poleis*. Eventually, as a result of the Greek settlements abroad, it extended geographically to southern Italy, Sicily, and southern France in the West, to North Africa, and to the coasts of the Black Sea in the northeast. In the Western Mediterranean, the role of the Phoenicians was taken over by the Carthaginians, who controlled large areas in North Africa and Spain, as well as in Sardinia and western Sicily. Alexander's victory over the Persian Empire and the establishment of a realm stretching from Macedonia and Egypt to modern-day Afghanistan and Pakistan led to the Hellenization of much of Western and Central Eurasia, including the emergence of a Greek culture in Bactria that subsequently influenced the cultural development of India. Following their defeat of Carthage, the Romans gradually created an imperium that encompassed the entire Mediterranean and parts of north-western Europe. During the age of migrations, this empire was destroyed by the invasion of German tribes, with Germanic kingdoms arising in the West (fifth century CE), while Byzantium was able to hold its own in the East.

After Alexander, the history of much of Western Eurasia was shaped first by the rise of the Parthians, who expelled the Macedonian Seleucid Kingdom from Mesopotamia and Iran during the second century BCE. The Parthians were followed in the third century CE by the Sassanians who, in turn, revived the traditions of the Persian Empire. The Arab-Muslim expansion and the establishment of the Caliphate in Mesopotamia constituted a deep rupture in the political and cultural development of North Africa, the East, and Central Asia.

In the period after 800 BCE, India and China were by no means a uniform realm with a homogeneous culture. In the centuries that followed, there were repeated attempts to create large empires in the areas of India and China, but regional opposition and the formation of local dominions resulted in the collapse of these realms and centuries of internal warfare. In India, the Mauryan Empire (third century BCE) and the Gupta Empire (fourth/sixth centuries CE) did not last and were replaced by regional powers. In China during the third century BCE, by contrast, the Han Dynasty was able to establish an empire that encompassed the entire Chinese realm and created a

uniform Chinese culture. Trade gave rise to close ties between India and China, and they were deepened by the reception of Buddhism in China. In this way, the Chinese appropriated many elements of Indian culture and integrated them into their own mental world. Trade also created links between the ancient Mediterranean and both India and China: the Silk Roads led through Central Asia, and a sea route from the Red Sea to India.

Given such diverse trajectories of historical development, the history of knowledge about nature in Europe, Asia, and Africa was not a continuous and linear process of accumulating information, but one that was characterized by continuity and discontinuity, by ruptures as well as losses of knowledge. Alongside the growth of knowledge within a society through the systematic recording of empirical knowledge and deliberate investigation stood transfer processes conditioned by the direct encounter with foreign cultures, primarily in trading centers. In addition, the adoption and reception of the knowledge of foreign societies through the translation of texts was consciously promoted. Something similar also applies to technological achievements and technical knowledge.

In the period between 800 BCE and 800 CE, the civilizations in Europe, North Africa, and Asia underwent a profound transformation. In 800 CE the development of knowledge of nature and technology had not been completed in many areas and regions, but the foundations had been laid for the developments that would fundamentally shape the European Middle Ages, the Arab world to the conquest of Byzantium, but also the cultures of East Asia until the age of imperialism.

Developments in science in the Mediterranean region

Ancient Greece

A process of eminent historical importance – especially to the history of the knowledge about nature and technology – was the cultural, political, and economic development of Greece during the Archaic Period (800–500 BCE). This period witnessed intensive contact between the Greeks and Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt. The Greeks, who had admired especially the ancient culture of Egypt, were fully aware that they had adopted fundamental cultural technologies from Egypt and Mesopotamia, as well as the Phoenicians. It is in this context that one should mention the appropriation of Phoenician writing in the eighth century BCE. The Greeks developed an alphabet that

also had vowels and was thus suitable for recording the spoken word. Since the Greek alphabet was composed of a small number of letters, it was easy to learn, with the result that literacy was widespread in the urban centers of Greece. At the same time, papyrus (which came from the Nile delta) provided the Greeks with a writing material that made it possible to record longer texts that could be kept as scrolls. The first libraries arose during the Classic Period (500–338 BCE), which allowed for knowledge to be stored and made accessible to the educated class. Greek society had thus acquired the capacity to access a growing stock of existing knowledge and to generate new knowledge.

The Greek city had no monarchy with religious legitimation, and there were no priesthoods that could have laid claim to possessing the only true knowledge about the gods and the world. Politics was rationally discussed in the popular assemblies or councils of the *poleis*, and it was part of the daily life of the cities that arguments were presented and justified. Under these conditions it was possible for individual sages in the Ionian cities of Asia Minor to begin pondering also the earth and the world. These thinkers could speak about heavenly bodies like the sun and the moon without equating them with divinities or endowing them with divine characteristics. No priesthood and no ruler put a stop to such speculations.

In pre-Socratic philosophy the contemplation of nature was focused especially on the heavens and the movement of the heavenly bodies. In addition there were questions about the origin of the world and the fundamental principles governing genesis and passing away, and about the basic matter to which one could trace back the variety of things. The observation of the heavens did not serve to record the movements of the sun, the moon, the planets, and the fixed stars for the purpose of a reliable measurement of time. Instead, the early philosophers were intent on fathoming the true form of the earth and the world.

Greek natural philosophy begins with Thales of Miletus (middle of the sixth century BCE), who spent some time in Egypt and is said to have brought knowledge of geometry to Greece from there. It is reported that Thales observed the heavenly bodies and was able to predict a solar eclipse. Thales assumed, probably under the influence of Mesopotamian mythology, that the earth rested on water, and he referred to water as the fundamental principle (*arché*) of all things, which alone remained unchanged. Anaximander, a student of Thales, likewise posed the question about the *arché*, but he identified the “indefinite” (*apeiron*) as the principle of all being. A path-breaking achievement was Anaximander’s attempt to describe the true shape of the earth and the world and in this way also explain the movements

of the heavenly bodies. In his view the earth had a cylindrical form similar to a column drum; the height of this cylinder was one-third of its diameter. One of the two surfaces was inhabited by humans. The earth was at the center of the world and remained there unmoved. Sun and moon were conceived as two rings, similar to wagon wheels, and contained fire within. The fire became visible through openings in these rings. Anaximander already indicated the relative sizes for the heavens: the circle of the sun is twenty-seven times the size of the earth, and eighteen times that of the moon. This statement is the beginning of the measurement of the heavens and the earth.¹

Subsequent generations of Greek philosophers considered Anaximander's statements inadequate as an explanation for the unmoving nature of the earth and the heavenly movements. Anaximenes, for example, assumed that the earth was flat and rested on air, which it did not cut through because of its breadth. The heavenly bodies had a fiery nature, the sun was flat like a leaf and did not move below the earth, but circled it the way a hat sits on the head. The sun became invisible because it was obscured by higher parts of the earth in the north, and this created night.

Empedocles's view that all things were made up of four elements – fire, air, earth, and water – was important to later classical philosophy. He initially identified these elements with divinities like Zeus and Hera, though they also appeared in connection with the heavens and the heavenly bodies.

Fundamentally distinct from these views was the idea formulated by Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans: the first principles were numbers and numerical ratios. The latter were highly significant especially for harmony, since the intervals between the tones correspond to certain numerical ratios, which Pythagoras, according to Iamblichus, verified experimentally. This was the first time in the study of nature that a connection had been established between natural phenomena and mathematics.² The Pythagoreans also developed an unconventional conception of the universe: they claimed that a fire was at the center of the universe, but that the earth was a heavenly

1 The Presocratics have been discussed in William Keith Chambers Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1962), vol. 1, pp. 45–115; Samuel Sambursky, *Das Physikalische Weltbild der Antike* (Zürich: Akademie-Verl, 1965), p. 107; G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 81–137; and Walter Burkert, *Weisheit und Wissenschaft: Studien zu Pythagoras, Philolaos und Platon* (Nuremberg: Hans Carl, 1962), p. 69.

2 On the Pythagoreans, see Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 212–306; Sambursky, *Das Physikalische*, pp. 44–73; Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd, *Aristotle: The Growth and Structure of His Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 24–35; Ivor Thomas (ed.), *Greek Mathematical Works* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), vol. 1, pp. 66–141 and 172–225; and Kirk et al., *Presocratic Philosophers*, pp. 232–35 and 342–45.

body that moved around this center in a circle; there was also a second earth, which they called the counter-earth. An important contribution to Greek cosmology was also made by Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (c. 500–428 BCE), who assumed that the sun was a fiery mass which he believed to be larger than the Peloponnese. The flat earth rested at the center of the universe, the moon was closer to the earth than the sun, from which it derived its light.³ According to the testimony of Plato, Anaxagoras believed that reason (*nous*) had ordered the world. With that, it was fundamentally possible for human reason to fathom the rationally ordered world.⁴

The formulation of such views about the cosmos encountered stern resistance even in democratic Athens. On the eve of the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War (431 BCE), Diopeithes submitted a proposal to the Athenian popular assembly that anyone who did not believe in the gods and examined matters above the earth in speeches should be brought to trial. Anaxagoras left Athens for Lampsacus to escape a charge of impiety.⁵ Socrates was eventually put on trial in 399 BCE for examining things below the earth and in the heavens, corrupting the youth, and failing to acknowledge the gods of the city.⁶ The death sentence against Socrates clearly reveals the limits of Athenian tolerance toward efforts at understanding nature and explaining it rationally, without recourse to the gods. But thinking about nature could not be suppressed in Athens, and Plato and Aristotle continued the studies of the early philosophers in fourth-century Athens.

The writings of the pre-Socratic philosophers have survived at most in fragments. Their views and theses are reported by ancient philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, and authors who – like Diogenes Laërtius, for example – wrote about the history of philosophy or composed commentaries on older texts. By contrast, the writings of Plato and Aristotle have survived, allowing for good analyses of the positions of classical Greek philosophy. Plato (428–348 BCE) laid out his theory on the nature of the universe and the creation of the world in *Timaeus*. Here we can touch only on a few aspects of this

3 Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2, 8–10; Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 304–309; Sambursky, *Das Physikalische*, pp. 39–43; and Kirk et al., *Presocratic Philosophers*, pp. 380–82.

4 Plato, *Phaedo*, 97b–98b; Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2,6; Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 272–79; and Kirk et al., *Presocratic Philosophers*, pp. 362–65.

5 Plutarch, *Pericles*, 32,2 and 32,5; Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2,12; and Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 1, p. 268.

6 Plato, *Apologia*, 18a–19b, 23d, and 24b–c.

complex text, in which Plato picked up numerous ideas of the older philosophy but integrated them into his own cosmological theory.

The world is the work of a beneficent god, who created order out of chaos. The substance of the creation was formed out of fire and earth with the addition of air and water; the cosmos had the shape of a globe, which was regarded as a perfect form. The heavens of fixed stars described a circular orbit around the center, just as the planets each moved along a circular track. The moon and the sun revolved around the earth, with the moon being closer to the earth than the sun. The calculation of time was based on the movement of the heavenly bodies: the month on the orbit of the moon, the year on that of the sun. The earth, which was connected to the world axis, created day and night with its rotation. As with Empedocles, matter was made up of the four elements of fire, earth, water, and air. According to Plato, these elements were in turn identical with shapes that were each made up of triangles. The triangle thus constituted the mathematical foundation for the study of nature. Earth was equated with the cube, fire with the tetrahedron, air with the octahedron, and water with the icosahedron. Plato assumed that the four elements were not invariable but could change and merge one into the other.⁷

While Plato still accorded great importance to the creator-god and imagined the cosmos as animated by a soul, Aristotle (384–322 BCE) largely eliminated such ideas from his natural philosophy. He devoted a separate treatise to the heavenly bodies and the cosmos (*De Caelo*, On the Heavens), in which he critically examined the positions of earlier natural philosophers and gave an authoritative expression to the worldview of antiquity.⁸ In Aristotle's view, the heavens were subject to neither creation nor corruption but were eternal. Moreover, there was only one heaven, which possessed the shape of a sphere and moved evenly in a circle. The heavenly bodies were likewise spherical. From the observation that the fixed stars, unlike the planets, glittered, Aristotle deduced that the latter were closer to the earth than the fixed stars. The earth was conceived as a sphere that rested unmoving at the center of the cosmos. The spherical shape of the earth was also evident from the fact that the stars were not equally visible in all regions. Aristotle also regarded this as evidence that the earth was not especially large. That is why he could surmise that the regions in the far west, at the Pillars of Hercules,

7 Plato, *Timaeus*, 30a–d, 32b–33d, 38b–39e, and 53c–56c, and Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. v, pp. 280–85.

8 Sambursky, *Das Physikalische*, pp. 112–43; Lloyd, *Aristotle*, pp. 133–64; and Hellmut Flashar, *Aristoteles: Lehrer des Abendlandes* (Munich: Beck, 2013), pp. 266–74.

were not far from India, as indicated also by the fauna, for example the presence of elephants in Africa and India. Finally, Aristotle cited the calculation of mathematicians who put the circumference of the earth at around 400,000 stadia (about 74,000 km).⁹

In the archaic and classical period of Greece, astronomy and cosmology had largely uncoupled themselves from religious ideas and doctrines. The early philosophers, Plato, and Aristotle attempted to describe the earth and the heavens in accordance with their observations and to measure the earth and the heavenly realm.

The description and explanation of natural phenomena was not limited to the heavens and astronomy. Already the pre-Socratic philosophers examined questions of human anatomy and physiology with great intensity. Alcmaeon of Croton in southern Italy and Empedocles of Acragas in Sicily attempted to grasp and explain sensory perception precisely. Alcmaeon is said to have discovered the optic nerves and their connection to the brain, and Empedocles explained the anatomy of the eye through a comparison with the light from a lantern.

A comprehensive theory of nature was articulated by Democritus (late fifth century BCE), who hailed from northern Greece (Abdera). He reduced all natural phenomena to the movement of invisible, tiny, indivisible elements of matter (atoms). The precondition for the movements of the atoms was the assumption of the existence of empty space. According to Democritus, the differing characteristics of matter rested on the differing forms of the atoms and on the combinations that atoms formed with one another. Democritus maintained that the atoms moved out of necessity and thus without a plan. The ideas of atomism also had consequences for cosmology: Democritus posited the existence of countless worlds, which were also subject to birth and decay and thus not eternal.¹⁰ This atomic theory was vigorously rejected by Plato and Aristotle; Plato is even said to have considered burning all of the writings of Democritus he could get his hands on but was eventually dissuaded from doing so by two Pythagoreans.

For Plato, natural science (*peri physeos istoria*) was already an established discipline within philosophy.¹¹ Notable are the themes that Plato mentioned in this context in *Phaido*: natural science studied the causes of genesis and decay, the generation of animals, and the question of whether thinking could be traced back to blood, fire, or air, and whether the brain brought forth all

⁹ Aristotle, *de caelo*, 283b–289a, 290a, 293a–297b, and 298a.

¹⁰ Sambursky, *Das Physikalische*, pp. 144–81, and Kirk et al., *Presocratic Philosophers*, pp. 413–27.

¹¹ Plato, *Phaedo*, 96a–c, and Aristotle, *de caelo*, 268a.

perceptions. Plato picked up these themes in *Timaeus*: he described the function of the individual organs and of blood, explained respiration, and expounded on the aging process.¹² Even though Plato's views are factually wrong and the methodology of his statements is based on vague associations, he deserves credit for having discussed the question about the human being and his nature within the framework of cosmology.

Aristotle's writings on zoology and those of Theophrastus on botany represented a fundamental scientific advance.¹³ Aristotle did not provide a systematic survey of the animal world, but he examined above all specific problems like the procreation of animals or the forms of their locomotion. Characteristic for Theophrastus is the visible interest in the utilization of plants for human purposes; thus, in his discussion on wood he elaborated on the suitability of certain kinds of wood for the building of houses or ships, and he examined the question of which wood could be used in crafts as fuel for various purposes.

As an important scientific achievement on the part of Aristotle, one should mention the writings referred to as *Physica*. These are not a description of physics in the modern sense, but a theoretical text in which the author reflects upon the foundations of all scientific study of nature (*physis*). Aristotle distinguished between natural things and artifacts and then devoted himself to the question of what kinds of causes there are and how many. This is followed by a theory of movement and change. Here Aristotle listed three kinds of change: quantity, quality, and place. In the case of a change of place, Aristotle assumed that light bodies by nature moved upward, while heavy bodies fell downward. Likewise, the circular motion that could be observed in the sky was a natural movement, though it was unique to the heavenly bodies. Aristotle explained propulsive motion with the movement of the medium that surrounded the propelled object. The air that was agitated by the propulsive movement in turn drove the object forward until the force of the moving air was used up.¹⁴

Another innovation in the area of philosophical investigation was the establishment of the academy and of the peripatos in Athens. These philosophers' schools had libraries that made the older philosophical texts available

12 Plato, *Timaeus*, 69a–76e, 77c–79e, and 80d–81e.

13 Lloyd, *Aristotle*, pp. 68–93; Flashar, *Aristoteles*, pp. 319–50; Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd, *Greek Science after Aristotle* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973), pp. 12–15; and Helmuth Schneider, *Das griechische Technikverständnis: Von den Epen Homers bis zu den Anfängen der technologischen Fachliteratur* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989), pp. 264–70.

14 Lloyd, *Aristotle*, pp. 159–80, and Flashar, *Aristoteles*, pp. 241–65.

to teachers and students and also collected the writings of Plato and Aristotle. With these schools, an institutionalization of philosophy and thus also of natural science had been achieved.

Developments similar to what occurred in natural science can be observed in Greek medicine. The physicians of the fifth century BCE traced illnesses back to their natural causes and in so doing redefined the tasks of the doctor. The point was to analyze the natural preconditions of illnesses and administer the appropriate treatment. This change in the understanding of illness and health found expression in the older texts of the *Corpus Hippocraticum*, a collection of medical writings attributed in antiquity to the physician Hippocrates. The treatise "On the Sacred Disease" emphatically rejected the notion that epilepsy was divine in origin; it pointed out that this illness was hereditary and often tied to certain bodily constitutions. Crucial was the realization that epilepsy was an illness of the brain, which meant that the seizures suffered by epileptics had a natural cause. This insight was justified with reference to goats: if the head of stricken animals was dissected, one found that the brain was "humid, full of sweat, and having a bad smell." From this the writer of the treatise concluded "that it is not a god that injures the body, but disease." And he went on to declare emphatically: "And so it is with man." The text is polemically directed against miracle healers and charlatans, who pretended to cure the malady by purifications and incantations. Even if the text contains a number of erroneous assertions about human anatomy, it stands at the beginning of a rational medicine, one that attempts to expand the knowledge of diseases and treatments by observing the course of illnesses and describing medical interventions.¹⁵

Alexandria

A new era of natural science in ancient Greece began in Alexandria. Following the early death of Alexander, who had conquered the Persian Empire, Ptolemy, one of his generals, was able to gain control of Egypt and establish the dynasty of the Macedonian kings of Egypt. Alexandria, a city founded by Alexander in the western Nile delta, became the residence of the Ptolemies, who established the Mouseion there, a library and research institution. Leading Greek scholars of the third century BCE were called to Alexandria to the Mouseion, which replaced Athens as the most important

15 Huldyrch M. Koelbing, *Arzt und Patient in der antiken Welt* (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1977), pp. 65–77; Lloyd, *Aristotle*, pp. 50–65; and James Longrigg, *Greek Rational Medicine: Philosophy and Medicine from Alcmaeon to the Alexandrians* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 34–38.

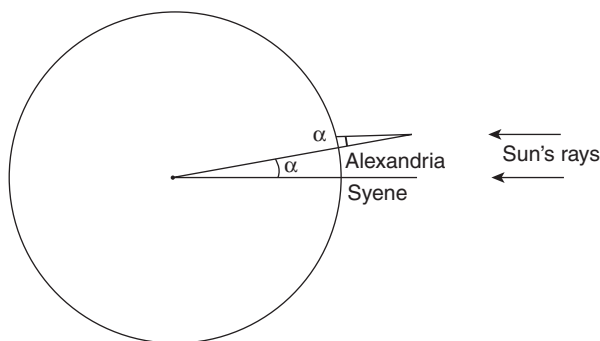


Figure 6.1 Eratosthenes' method of calculating the circumference of the earth (G. E. R. Lloyd, *Greek Science after Aristotle*, London 1973, p. 50, fig. 3)

center of study and research in the ancient world.¹⁶ Under these favorable conditions, Alexandrine scholars were able to arrive at pathbreaking new insights. For example, in the second half of the third century BCE, Eratosthenes was able to determine the circumference of the earth much more precisely than the mathematicians cited by Aristotle. He did this by first measuring the angles of the sunbeams in Alexandria and in Syene (today Aswan) at the summer solstice. Based on the difference in the angles, which corresponded to $1/50$ th of the circle, and given a distance between the two locations of 5,000 stadia, Eratosthenes was able to fix the circumference of the earth at 250,000 stadia, a number that cannot be precisely converted, since various stadia of differing lengths (between 162 and 210 meters) existed in antiquity. Yet it is at least clear that Eratosthenes's calculation came very close to the actual circumference (40,074 km) (see Fig. 6.1).¹⁷

A new insight also occurred in the measurement of the heavens: Aristarchus of Samos had realized that at half-moon, the line between the earth, moon, and sun formed a right-angled triangle, and that one could determine the relative distances between earth and moon and earth and sun from the angle between the lines connecting earth and moon and earth and sun. Aristarchos assumed that the sun was nineteen times further from the

¹⁶ Bertrand Gille, *Les mécaniciens grecs: La naissance de la technologie* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), pp. 54–82, and Bernd Seidensticker, "Alexandria: Die Bibliothek der Könige und die Wissenschaften," in Alexander Demandt (ed.), *Stätten des Geistes: Große Universitäten Europas von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999), pp. 15–26.

¹⁷ Lloyd, *Greek Science*, pp. 49–50; Thomas (ed.), *Greek Mathematical Works*, vol. 11, pp. 266–73; and Seidensticker, "Alexandria," pp. 28–30.

earth than was the moon. In spite of the imprecision of this calculation, the attempt to grasp the relationship between the distances in the heavenly sphere was pathbreaking for later astronomy.¹⁸ In the third century BCE, the size ratios of the heavenly bodies were also clarified: according to the testimony of Archimedes, there was agreement among astronomers that “the diameter of the earth is greater than the diameter of the moon, and the diameter of the sun is greater than the diameter of the earth.”¹⁹

However, Aristarchus’ idea that the sun, not the earth, formed the center of the universe had no effect on ancient astronomy. Archimedes described the heliocentric worldview of Aristarchus as follows: “His hypotheses are that the fixed stars and the Sun remain unmoved, that the Earth revolves about the Sun on the circumference of a circle, the Sun lying in the middle of the Floor, and that the sphere of the fixed stars, situated about the same center as the Sun, is so great that the circle in which he supposes the Earth to revolve bears such a proportion to the distance of the fixed stars as the center of the sphere bears to its surface.”²⁰

The work of Claudius Ptolemy, who was active in Alexandria in the second century CE, formed the high point and conclusion of ancient astronomy. In Ptolemy, the earth had the shape of a sphere and rested at the center of the universe, which was composed of orbicular spheres, the furthest of which was that of the fixed stars. Of the planets, Mercury and Venus were closer to the earth, all others were at a greater distance than the sun. Drawing on the works of Hipparchus (second century BCE), Ptolemy ascribed two movements to each planet: a circular movement around the earth, and a circular movement around a point lying on the circular orbit around the earth. With the help of this epicycle theory, it was possible to adequately explain the seemingly varying speed and the retrograde motion of the planets that could be observed from earth, and to precisely calculate and predict the planetary movements (see Fig. 6.2). This heliocentric theory of the heavens held sway in Christian Europe until the fifteenth century CE and was also widely adopted in the Arab world through translations.²¹

Ancient astronomy was not conceivable without the advances in mathematics. By their own admission, the Greeks had adopted geometry from the

18 Sambursky, *Das Physikalische*, pp. 108–11, and Seidensticker, “Alexandria,” pp. 33–34.

19 Archimedes, *Psammites* [The Sand-Reckoner], 1,8, and Thomas (ed.), *Greek Mathematical Works*, vol. 11, pp. 6–15.

20 Archimedes, *Psammites* [The Sand-Reckoner], 1,4–6; Lloyd, *Greek Science*, pp. 53–7; and Thomas (ed.), *Greek Mathematical Works*, vol. 11, pp. 2–5.

21 Lloyd, *Greek Science*, pp. 113–31, and Menso Folkerts, “Klaudios Ptolemaios,” *Der Neue Pauly* 10 (2001), 559–60 and 566–67.

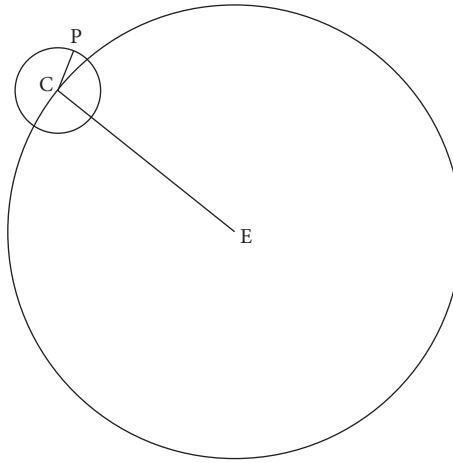


Figure 6.2 Ptolemy, the epicyclic motion of the planets (G. E. R. Lloyd, *Greek Science after Aristotle*, London 1973, p. 62, fig. 5). E = earth; P = planet; C = center of epicycle

Egyptians. Numbers played a significant role already in the philosophy of the Pythagoreans: individual numbers were equated with certain terms and natural phenomena were traced back to numbers and their relationships. Aristotle summed up this view of the Pythagoreans by stating that “they supposed the elements of numbers to be the elements of all things, and the whole heaven to be a musical scale and a number.”²² In geometry, the Pythagoreans formulated general theorems and proved their validity. Plato distinguished clearly between applied and theoretical mathematics, with the latter taking precedence for him. This attitude favored research into pure mathematics beyond practical application.²³ In the early third century in Alexandria, Euclid composed a systematic treatise on mathematics, entitled *Elements* (*stoicheia*). It offered definitions of all important mathematical concepts, axioms, and propositions, taking into account both geometry and arithmetics. Number theory analyzed the properties of even and odd numbers. Classic proofs in mathematics began with Euclid, and the *Stoicheia* remained the fundamental treatise on mathematics into the modern period. In the generation after Euclid, Archimedes devoted himself to individual problems in mathematics, such as determining the location of the center of gravity of plains or calculating the surface of a cylinder, a cone, and a sphere. His treatise on the methodology of mathematical research is of fundamental

²² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 986a.

²³ Plato, *Respublica*, 525b–526c, and Plato, *Philebus*, 56d–57d.

importance. In the area of physics, Archimedes was able to explain the fact that objects float with the specific density of the liquid and the objects.²⁴

Ancient Rome and late antiquity Europe

Few advances in natural science occurred during the Roman period. Ptolemy's theory about the movement of heavenly bodies was based essentially on the research of Hellenistic astronomy and the measurements of Babylonian observation. Roman authors attempted to summarize Greek knowledge about nature. For example, in the mid-first century BCE Lucretius devoted a large didactic poem spanning all areas of natural science to the views of Democritus and Epicurus; before 79 CE, C. Plinius Secundus created a large, multi-volume encyclopedia of natural science, the *Historia Naturalis*, which provided an overview of the ancient knowledge of cosmology, geography, anthropology, zoology, botany, and mineralogy.

In late antiquity, John Philoponus (c. 490–575 CE) formulated a fundamental critique of Aristotle's views on natural philosophy and in this way arrived at new physical insights. His theory on the throwing motion exerted a special influence on medieval and early modern thinking: rejecting the position of Aristotle, who had sought to explain the movement of a thrown object with the capacity of the surrounding medium to produce movement, he formulated the impetus theory, which stated that the thrower transferred a force to the object during a throw.²⁵

In Western Europe and the Western Mediterranean, the invasions of Germanic tribes and the collapse of the West Roman Empire led to a decay of cities and with that also of the urban-based culture of antiquity. Literacy, rhetoric, literature, and philosophy were in decline, and the libraries of the urban elites vanished. Monasteries now replaced cities as cultural centers, as the rules of the monastic orders promoted reading and the copying of texts. It was thanks to the initiative of a few clerics that the pagan Latin literature was also collected in monastic libraries and thus preserved. Toward the end of the eighth century, the Carolingian Renaissance finally initiated a return to language and style; classical Latin texts were now seen especially as models for the use of the Latin language.

24 Thomas (ed.), *Greek Mathematical Works*, vol. 1, pp. 436–509; Thomas (ed.), *Greek Mathematical Works*, vol. 11, pp. 18–257; Menso Folkerts, "Archimedes [1, aus Syrakus]," *Der Neue Pauly* 1 (1996), 997–1001; and Menso Folkerts, "Eukleides 3 (Euklid)," *Der Neue Pauly* 4 (1998), 238–39.

25 Sambursky, *Das Physikalische*, pp. 465–70, and Michael Wolff, *Geschichte der Impetustheorie: Untersuchungen zum Ursprung der klassischen Mechanik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978), pp. 67–83.

Because Christianity drew upon Holy Scripture as the word of God, a philosophical investigation of nature that was independent of faith was possible only within narrow boundaries; biblical views about the cosmos were no longer questioned and were regarded as dogma. The library in Alexandria lost its status as a research institution in late antiquity, a philosopher like Hypatia was murdered by a Christian mob in 415, and a law of Justinian in 529 prohibited any instruction in philosophy and astronomy. At that time, the Academy in Athens founded by Plato was closed as an institution of pagan philosophy.

Developments in technology in the Mediterranean region

The development of technology in antiquity was shaped in equal measure by inventions and innovations, by technology transfer and the adoption of technical artefacts and processes from foreign cultures, by the preservation of traditional technology, and also by stagnation. There are areas in which the civilization of the Mediterranean saw hardly any technological change well beyond antiquity into the early modern period. In agriculture, oxen hitched to a yoke pulled a primitive wooden plow, and threshing, winnowing, and the grinding of grain with a simple stone grinder were important operations in agriculture and the household. Grain, olive oil, and wine were the chief components of the diet. Smiths heated iron until it was red-hot and worked it with the hammer on an anvil, or they shaped metals like silver and copper through hammering. Storage containers for grain as well as for oil and wine were made of clay, as were the dishes and crockery of daily use. Ceramic vessels were pulled up on the rapidly rotating pottery wheel. Women spun wool with a spindle and wove cloth on a vertical loom. But the impression that no significant technological advances occurred in ancient civilization is misleading. In fact, between the eighth century BCE and the fifth century CE, the Mediterranean world witnessed a series of innovations that would influence the development of civilization. The preindustrial agrarian societies certainly possessed a dynamism in the technological and economic sphere. In the process, there were various epochs in ancient history during which a notable cumulation of technological changes occurred.²⁶

In the Archaic Period, the Greeks had close trading contacts with Egypt and the east, and they came face to face with older cultures that were in many respects far superior to their own. The influence of the eastern cultures on

²⁶ Kenneth D. White, *Greek and Roman Technology* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1984), pp. 27–48.

Greece is clearly visible in two areas: monumental architecture and sculpture. The early sixth century BCE saw the beginning, in Greece and in the Greek cities of Sicily and southern Italy, of the construction of monumental temples of stone, and at the same time larger-than-life statues of deceased young men were erected within the homes of aristocratic families. The material for the buildings and statues was transported across great distances: marble, for example, came from Paros, later, in the fifth century, also from Pentelikon in Attica. Temple building developed not only architectural planning and stonemasonry, but also hoisting technology.²⁷

In the late sixth century BCE, the Greeks achieved an important innovation for classical culture with the discovery of hollow casting of bronze. While in Archaic times small statuettes of bronze could be cast with the lost mold method or larger statues produced through hammering (*sphyrelata*), it was now possible to cast large statues. Greek craftsmen first modeled the statue in clay, and then negative moulds were taken from this model. Parts of the statue were cast individually and then joined together, with careful finishing of the surface removing the traces of this method. This technique allowed for the creation of statues that extended widely into space through the position of arms and legs, and it became increasingly possible to depict the bodies of humans and animals in motion. The large bronze horse that was found in the Roman neighborhood of Trastevere provides a fascinating example.

The fourth century BCE saw innovations in military technology that led to fundamental changes in military strategy. One should mention, first, the use of catapults and mobile siege towers in laying siege to fortified cities. Under these conditions, the battle over cities turned into a battle of engineers, an excellent illustration of which is the siege of Syracuse. The war machines devised by Archimedes to defend the city against the Romans were so effective that the Romans refrained from a direct attack and eventually took the city through betrayal.

During the Hellenistic Age, the transfer of technology had great significance for the development of the regions conquered by Alexander. This is especially true for Egypt, where the Ptolemies introduced new strains of grain, greatly expanded the cultivated land through irrigation, and embarked on new paths even in building technology. For example, the construction of a causeway over three-quarters of a mile long connecting Alexandria to the

27 John Boardman, *The Greek Sculpture: The Archaic Period* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 18–81, and White, *Greek and Roman Technology*, pp. 73–81.

island of Pharos created large harbor basins, and the construction of a large lighthouse guided sailors in their entry into the harbor.

Two inventions during Roman times virtually revolutionized architecture: concrete (*opus caementicium*) made it possible to pour formworks and thus create not only walls, but also vaults and domes. Since the *opus caementicium* was very strong after drying, it could be used to cover large interior spaces without supports. One example is the Pantheon (early second century BCE), whose dome, with a diameter of 43.30 meters, is larger than the domes of the Duomo in Florence, St. Peter's in Rome, or St. Paul's Cathedral in London. The high point of this architecture is Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, whose dome rests on four mighty pillars connected by arches. The *opus caementicium* was also important for the construction of harbors, since the material set under water.

The second important innovation was mastery of arched construction: the façade of the Colosseum provides an impressive demonstration of the ability to utilize the arch as an architectural element. The arch was of the utmost importance to infrastructure, since it allowed the Romans to build bridges with vast spans and thus trace out their road network with no regard for the course of rivers. And the long arched spans of the water conduits outside of Rome and of the aqueduct bridges – like Pont du Gard in southern France – presupposed the mastery of arched construction.²⁸

Advances were also evident in agrarian technology. Beginning in the first century CE, greatly improved presses were used in the production of wine and olive oil. Pressure on the press material was created by pulling down the large pressing beam through the turning of a screw; another type of press consisted of a screw that exerted pressure directly on the press material. The latter type was used in textile manufacturing for the pressing of fabric.

The plow was improved; for the northwestern provinces we have mention of plows that were equipped with wheels and were pulled by several teams of oxen. That made it possible to turn the heavy soils found in these regions. The Gallic reaper is also attested in the northwest of the Imperium Romanum: a two-wheeled wagon equipped at the front with teeth was pushed across the field by an animal (donkey or horse), causing the ears of grain to be picked up and dropped into a container (see Fig. 6.3). From northern Africa the Romans adopted the animal-drawn threshing sled that separated the grain

28 Jean-Paul Adam, *Roman Building: Materials and Techniques* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 158–95.

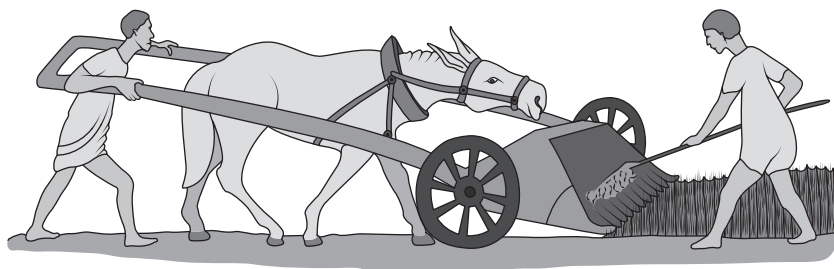


Figure 6.3 Gallic reaper (harvesting machine) (White, *Greek and Roman Technology*, London 1984, p. 61, fig. 47)

from the ears. Iron tools were widespread in agriculture: sickles and scythes had blades of iron, and plows were equipped with an iron plowshare.

The innovations in mining were of considerable economic importance. A crucial condition for the minting of coins, and thus for the money economy as a whole, was the extraction of precious metals such as silver and gold. Through the use of efficient water-scooping machines, it was also possible in Roman times to mine silver deposits below the groundwater level. For drainage a pump known as the Archimedean Screw was utilized, a device developed in the third century BCE by Archimedes to irrigate fields in Egypt. In addition, large waterwheels that were turned by humans were deployed. Installing several pairs of such waterwheels allowed water to be pumped over a considerable height differential to the entrances of the mining galleries (see Fig. 6.4).²⁹

Gold was also extracted in open-pit mines. Here, in the mountainous regions of northwest Spain, the Romans made use of the power of running water: above the gold deposits they constructed large water tanks that were supplied and filled with water via aqueducts, which were some 20 kilometers long. If the water tanks were opened, the water washed away the gold-bearing soil, allowing the gold to be eventually separated from the waste rock.

Roman trades witnessed technological changes that do not seem very significant at first glance, but which were in various respects economically and technically consequential. Ceramic craftsmen adopted the use of molds

²⁹ John F. Healy, *Mining and Metallurgy in the Greek and Roman World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), pp. 68–102; John G. Landels, *Engineering in the Ancient World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 58–83; and Claude Domergue, *Les mines antiques: La production des métaux aux époques grecque et romaine* (Paris: A&J Picard, 2008), pp. 120–28.

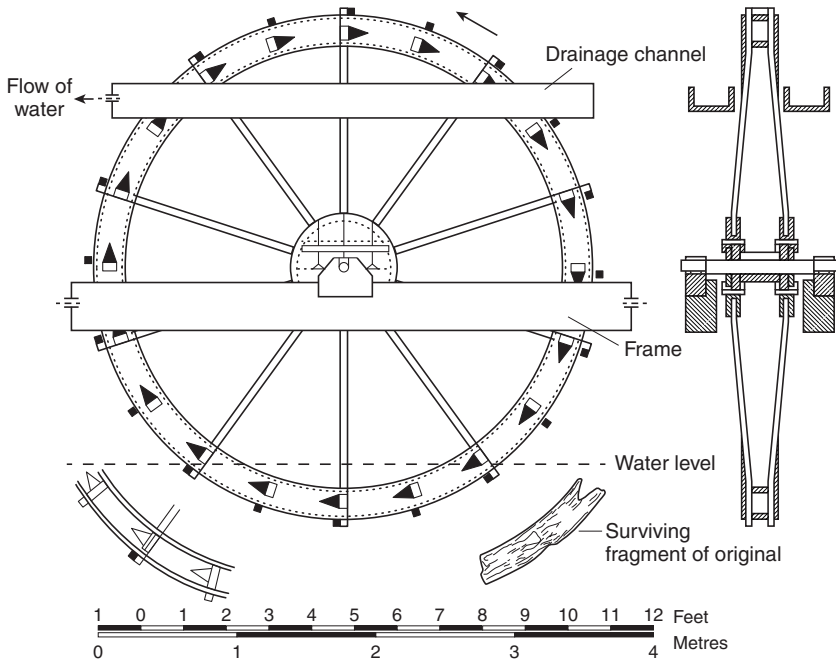


Figure 6.4 Waterwheel for mine drainage (J. F. Healy, *Mining and Metallurgy in the Greek and Roman World*, London 1978, p. 98, fig. 19)

in the production of terra sigillata: a single mold could be used to produce numerous identical vessels or bowls that displayed the relief decoration of the mold and thus no longer needed to be painted or ornamented. This technique significantly boosted the productivity in ceramic manufacturing. This was also reflected in the development of the kilns, which could accommodate thousands of pieces.³⁰

Thanks to a number of innovations, glass acquired a growing importance as a material. While in pre-Roman times it was chiefly glass beads or small vessels of colored glass that were produced, thanks to the technique of glass blowing it was possible, from the middle of the first century BCE, to manufacture bottles, containers, cups, and bowls out of translucent, colorless glass. Glass held a tremendous fascination for people, as attested by wall paintings of glass bowls from Pompeii. The possibility of producing window panes out

30 Donald Strong and David Brown (eds.), *Roman Crafts* (New York University Press, 1976), pp. 78–80 and 84–86.

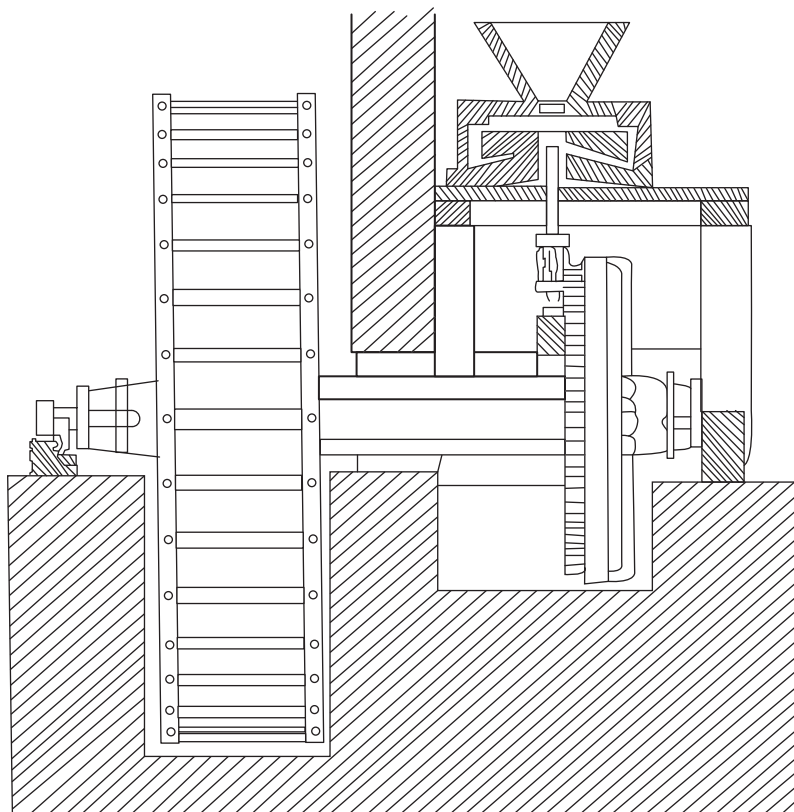


Figure 6.5 Roman water mill according to Vitruvius (G. E. R. Lloyd, *Greek Science after Aristotle*, London 1973, p. 107, fig. 22). The mill is powered by an undershot wheel, and power is transmitted, for varying purposes, by means of a gearing mechanism

of glass contributed substantially to a change in architecture. Buildings were now given façades with large windows through which daylight could penetrate into the interior rooms without affecting the interior climate from cold air flowing in from the outside.³¹

An important innovation for the history of European technology was the utilization of water power. Around 30 BCE, Vitruvius gave a precise description of the water mill constructed to grind grain: the rotational movement of the waterwheel was transferred to the millstone via a gearing mechanism (see Fig. 6.5). In late antiquity, engineers succeeded in converting the

31 Jennifer Price, "Glass," in Strong and Brown (eds.), *Roman Crafts*, pp. 111–25, and Axel von Saldern, *Antikes Glas* (Munich: Beck, 2004), pp. 200–202 and 218–322.

rotational movement of the waterwheel into a back-and-forth movement and thus were able to use water power to saw marble.³²

In addition, one must not overlook that fact that the emergence of a specialized literature on mechanics constituted significant progress in the mastery of nature and in the understanding of the effect of technical devices. The oldest extant writing on mechanics is found in the corpus of Aristotelian texts and dates to the fourth century BCE; in this work, Aristotle tried to explain why relatively little power could be used to move large weights. This phenomenon can be readily observed from the effect of the lever; Aristotle formulated the law of the lever and derived it from the characteristics of the circular movement. In the subsequent sections of the treatise, he attributed the effect of many instruments to the law of the lever.³³ In the first century CE, Hero of Alexandria then gave a systematic account of mechanics, in the process describing five fundamental instruments of mechanics and their workings: the roll, the lever, the pulley, the wedge, and the screw. Mechanics was certainly oriented toward praxis, as demonstrated by the use of the screw in machines to press wine, olives, or cloth.³⁴

In Hellenistic Alexandria there were two other fields in which important technological insights were achieved: the construction of automata and pneumatics. The goal of automata was to create surprise effects with machines that moved on their own, without any human intervention. Inscribed into the automata was a program that dictated the sequence of the movements of the apparatus. The creators of automata were able to develop new ways of translating movements. For example, one automaton in Philo's theater of automata called for converting a rotational into a back-and-forth movement. Pneumatics (derived from *pneuma*: puff of air, breath) studied the properties of air. It was recognized that flowing air was able to produce sounds, and that the heating of air created pressure. Contemporaries already understood that the steam created by heating water could in turn generate movement (see Fig. 6.6). The reception of Alexandrine pneumatics formed the basis for the experiments that were conducted in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and eventually led to the construction of the steam engine.³⁵

The invasions of the German tribes into the *Imperium Romanum* and the emergence of the Germanic kingdoms in the West entailed a decline of the

32 Vitruvius, *de architectura* 10.5, and Örjan Wikander, "The Water Mill," in Örjan Wikander (ed.), *Handbook of Ancient Water Technology* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 371–400.

33 Schneider, *Das griechische Technikverständnis*, pp. 234–63.

34 Gille, *Les mécaniciens grecs*, pp. 122–45.

35 Lloyd, *Greek Science*, pp. 91–112, and Gille, *Les mécaniciens grecs*, pp. 103–21.

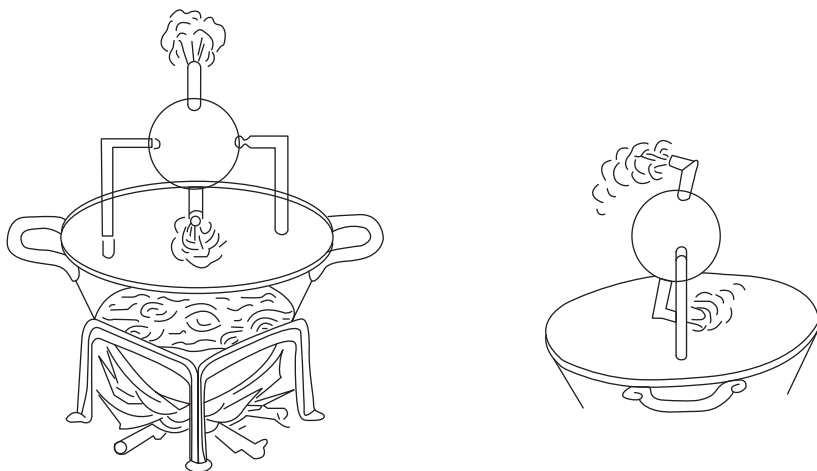


Figure 6.6 Hero's ball rotated by steam (G. E. R. Lloyd, *Greek Science after Aristotle*, London 1973, p. 105, fig. 21)

city-based Roman civilization. The technological change was especially evident in architecture: only a few larger stone buildings were created on the territory of the former western provinces, and the water conduits and the urban infrastructure decayed. The products of tradesmen and artisans lost their quality, while sculptures of stone or bronze statues are largely or entirely absent. Barely any iron tools were still used in agriculture. It was only around 800 that Europe witnessed the new beginning of a civilizational development. The building of monumental churches and larger buildings of stone began in the age of the Carolingians: the palace chapel in Aachen or the church of the Abbey of St. Denis (consecrated in 775) are the architectural witnesses to a profound civilizational transformation. Manuscript illumination or the design of ivory book covers likewise showed a clear advance in craftsmanship in the late eighth century. The development of crafts and architecture continued in the ninth and tenth centuries and gave rise to church building and Romanesque art.

Scientific and technological developments in South and East Asia

The civilizations in Europe, North Africa, and in the Near East and Asia were by no means isolated. In the wake of the campaigns of Alexander, there emerged in Bactria – roughly modern Afghanistan and Pakistan – a

Hellenistic Greek culture that radiated far into India. Roman trade with India led to close economic ties with the western coast of India, but goods from China, chiefly silk, also reached the Mediterranean via the Silk Roads or the sea route. In addition, close cultural and religious ties existed between India and China: for example, Chinese culture was profoundly shaped by Buddhism, an import from India.

Between 800 BCE and 800 CE, India and China witnessed a repeated trend toward the formation of empires. At the same time, the various regions of these large territories were able to assert themselves, with the result that the ages of great empires alternated with regional fragmentation. China, much like the Mediterranean region, was continually exposed to attacks by steppe peoples from the north. Unlike in the Mediterranean, where the sea and the maritime routes were of great importance to communication between the regions, for India and China the comparatively vast interior spaces posed a challenge to the enforcement of political power, to the economy, and to technology.

China

Various preconditions were important for the scientific and technological development in China. At the top one should mention the formation of a large empire that united central areas of modern-day China, along with the attendant need for a bureaucratic apparatus, the emergence of writing, urbanization, and the growth of population. What is striking in the process is the concurrence of the developments in the Mediterranean region and in East Asia. The first characters, incisions on animal bones, date from the thirteenth century BCE. These gave rise to written Chinese, whose characters consisted initially of pictorial depictions that also indicated a sound.³⁶ A lexicon in the early second century CE comprised 9,353 characters. This was a profound difference to the Mediterranean writing systems based on the Phoenician alphabet: Greek, for example, had an alphabet of only twenty-four letters and was thus easy to learn. As a result, literacy was relatively widespread in the societies of classical antiquity. In China, by contrast, an intellectual culture emerged in which literacy was largely reserved to an educated elite. In this connection one should mention the writing material as another factor: writing was done on bamboo or wooden tablets or silk. This material was heavy and difficult to handle. It was therefore a crucial advance when paper made of plant fibres established itself as writing material in the

³⁶ Kai Vogelsang, *Geschichte Chinas* (Stuttgart: Ph. Reclam, 2012), pp. 54–55 and 73–75.

Later Han period (first and second centuries CE).³⁷ Printing was a later invention and was hardly able to displace manuscript writing before 800 CE. What is clear, though, is that as early as the seventh century CE, members of Buddhist circles began to reproduce and disseminate texts with the help of printing. Different from Europe in the fifteenth century, printing was not done with movable letters, but with the block technique, where the text of an entire page was carved into a printing plate.

Early Chinese literature encompassed religious and philosophical texts as well as poems and songs. One emphasis in the writings of Confucius (551–479 BCE) was on the doctrine of ethical behavior. In addition, however, there were also texts on astronomy, cartography, mathematics, mechanics, and agriculture.³⁸ Interest in these disciplines seems to have been especially high during the Han period (202 BCE to 220 CE), and the investigations certainly yielded notable results. Chinese cosmology saw heaven and earth as two domes resting on top of each other, a notion that was subsequently replaced by the doctrine of the heavenly spheres. The shape of the world was illustrated through a comparison with the egg: just as the yolk was in the middle of the egg, the spherical earth rested at the center of the heavenly sphere. This theoretical view of the world was supplemented by the observation of the stars and the planets. Celestial charts during the Han period recorded 282 constellations with 1,465 stars.³⁹ A major achievement in mathematics was the work “The Nine Chapters on the Mathematical Art” (*Jiuzhang suanshu*; first century CE). One problem was determining the size of π , which was calculated with ever greater accuracy between the beginning of the first century and the fifth century CE. Using a geometrical method, Liu Hui in the third century determined the value for π to be between 3.1415927 and 3.1415926, which is very close to the modern value.⁴⁰

37 Dorothea Kuhn, “Wissenschaften und Technik,” in Roger Goepper (ed.), *Das Alte China: Geschichte und Kultur des Reiches der Mitte* (Munich: C. Bertelsmann, 1988), p. 264, and Vogelsang, *Geschichte Chinas*, pp. 98, 107, and 209–10.

38 Nishijima Sadao, “The Economic and Social History of the Former Han,” in Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), vol. 1, pp. 550–51; Kuhn, “Wissenschaften und Technik,” p. 258; and Vogelsang, *Geschichte Chinas*, pp. 107 and 205.

39 Kuhn, “Wissenschaften und Technik,” p. 260, and Ho Peng Yoke, “Astronomy in China,” in Helaine Selin (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine in Non-Western Cultures* (London: Springer, 1997), pp. 108–11.

40 Kuhn, “Wissenschaften und Technik,” pp. 260–61; Ulrich Libbrecht, “Mathematics in China,” in Selin (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science*, pp. 626–29; and Lam Lay Yong, “Pi in Chinese Mathematics,” in Selin (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science*, pp. 822–83.

As in all pre-industrial agrarian societies, the economic foundation of Chinese civilization was agriculture, which had to feed – in addition to the families of small farmers – the urban population. Rice cultivation was widespread in southern China. Rice, which was planted in wet paddies, yields substantially more calories per hectare than wheat and, like all cereals, is an excellent food that covers the need for nutrients on a large scale. The farmland was worked with a plow pulled by two oxen. A significant advance in agriculture was the use of iron tools beginning in the sixth century BCE, which greatly increased productivity. Between the sixth and second centuries BCE, the area under cultivation was considerably expanded through the construction of dams and canals, which made it possible to feed a growing population.⁴¹

Without a doubt, the technological advances in crafts, urban planning, and the development of infrastructure were among the great achievements of Chinese culture. Bronze working in China had a long tradition extending back into the second millennium BCE. Large, artfully decorated vessels were produced by the casting method. From the second century CE come stunningly beautiful animal figurines of bronze, which often served as grave goods.⁴² Unlike the Greeks and Romans, the Chinese were able to cast iron in the first half of the first millennium BCE. To do so, the metal had to be heated in the foundries to over 1100°C with the help of bellows. By reducing the carbon content of cast iron, the Chinese were already producing iron with the qualities of steel. Numerous tools and implements were made of cast iron, including plowshares and axes, which made it possible to transform entire forests into arable land.⁴³

Ceramic production reached a high level already in the late second millennium BCE; the vessels of clay or stoneware sported a colored glaze. Advances in firing technology allowed for the firing of a large number of pieces and thus the production of ceramics in great volumes for export. The manufacturing of porcelain is documented for the Tang period (seventh and eighth centuries CE), for which the Chinese used white clay (kaolin). Firing at

41 Jacques Gernet, *Le monde chinois* (Paris: A. Colin, 1972), p. 125; Sadao, "Economic and Social History of the Former Han," pp. 554, 560–64, and 568–74; Francesca Bray, "Agriculture in China," in Selin (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science*, pp. 17–19; and Vogelsang, *Geschichte Chinas*, p. 129.

42 Goepper (ed.), *Das Alte China*, pp. 331–42.

43 Gernet, *Le monde chinois*, pp. 68 and 123; Kuhn, "Wissenschaften und Technik," p. 253; Hua Jueming, "Metallurgy in China," in Selin (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science*, pp. 725–26; Vogelsang, *Geschichte Chinas*, pp. 88 and 102; and Plinius, *Naturalis Historia*, 34,145. ("Ferrum Sericum" is the best iron).

high temperatures made the white vessels slightly transparent and created a glass-like surface. While porcelain was among the chief export goods only from the fourteenth century on, that was true for silk already since antiquity. In Roman times, silk fabric was highly sought-after in the Mediterranean region and was a high-status object. Silk made its way to the West over the land route (the Silk Roads) or by sea via India. Silk production is extremely labor-intensive. Silkworm breeding had to be set up and the young worms had to be fed with mulberry leaves. The material for the silk threads was extracted from the cocoons of the silkworms. Processing of the raw silk was done with the spindle wheel driven by a pedal, and with the foot loom, where the path for the weft is opened by means of a foot-operated mechanism.⁴⁴

The achievements of the Chinese in the areas of infrastructure and large-scale construction were particularly impressive. Pride of place goes to the Great Wall, which arose in northern China out of various fortifications. In the third century BCE, the Qin emperors connected and expanded these fortifications, which served as a defensive barrier against attacking steppe peoples. Unlike the Great Wall that exists today, it was not yet made of stone, but consisted of ramparts of packed earth. Alongside the Great Wall one must place the large canals. As early as the third century, a canal was built on the Yellow River that allowed for the irrigation of an area of over 25,000 hectares. Around 600, Emperor Wen, who united the Chinese empire in the late sixth century, constructed a canal which, as a shipping route, connected the region at the lower reaches of the Yangtze River with northern China and secured the provisioning of the population in the north with rice. The kinds of resources and labor force the rulers could mobilize is illustrated by the scope of this project: the canal was 1,800 kilometers long and 40 meters wide.⁴⁵

The technological achievements of China also included inventions in the field of mechanics, especially the use of water power. There is evidence from the Han period (first and second centuries CE) for the utilization of water to grind grain. Thus began the development of the water mill, which is depicted in pictures from the Song period (tenth century) with a horizontal water wheel. To crush grain or operate the bellows used in the smelting of iron, it was necessary to convert the rotational movement of the water wheel into a back-and-forth movement. A complicated mechanism was also devised for

44 Gernet, *Le monde chinois*, pp. 97–100 and 125; Sadao, “Economic and Social History of the Former Han,” p. 585; Goepper (ed.), *Das Alte China*, pp. 163 and 343–56; and Vogelsang, *Geschichte Chinas*, pp. 133–34, 180–82, and 320–21.

45 Gernet, *Le monde chinois*, p. 202; Kuhn, “Wissenschaften und Technik,” pp. 256–58; and Vogelsang, *Geschichte Chinas*, pp. 129 and 135.

the “carriage with distance measure”: this was a horse-drawn two-wheeled wagon that indicated the distance covered through drum beats. Incidentally, a similar device for measuring the length of a journey is already attested in Vitruvius.⁴⁶

Of note is the mention of the invention of water-powered bellows in the Annals of the Later Han Dynasty. The Prefect Du Shi is credited with wanting to spare the people “labour and toil,” and indeed, “the people got great benefit for little labour” from using his bellows. Modern research has pointed out that water power made it possible to achieve above all a “continuous and more easily controllable air supply.”⁴⁷

In the period between 200 BCE and 800 CE, the foundations were laid in China for the development that led to further technological advances between the ninth and eleventh centuries and thus to an increase in productivity, especially also in agriculture, and which profoundly shaped Chinese culture of the modern period.

South Asia

In many respects, the development in India was similar to that in China: the emergence and collapse of empires, immigration, urbanization, internal wars, and local powers shaped Indian civilization in crucial ways. A turning point in the early history of India was the transition from an economy determined by animal husbandry and a semi-nomadic life to sedentariness and cultivation. In the fifth century BCE, larger cities arose in the valley of the Ganges, most of which were the residences of local rulers. Urbanization led to a change in material culture: as evidenced by the fortification of the cities with several kilometers of long ramparts and moats, Indian society at this time already possessed the technological and organizational competence needed for such large building projects, as well as the requisite resources of labor power and material. The necessity of providing the urban population with agricultural products led to an intensification of trading relations and to the diffusion of coins. Of great importance to India’s cultural development was the adoption in the northwest of Aramaic writing widely used in Persia, and the emergence of an Indian script in the eastern valley of the Ganges. The numerous large inscriptions of Ashoka (about 268–233 BCE) attest to a widespread literacy in the third century.⁴⁸ The primary writing material was birch

46 Kuhn, “Wissenschaften und Technik,” pp. 262–64, and Vitruvius, *de architectura*, 10,9.

47 Kuhn, “Wissenschaften und Technik,” p. 263.

48 Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *Geschichte Indiens: Von der Induskultur bis heute* (Munich: Beck, 2006), pp. 83–88.

bark.⁴⁹ Following the conquest of the Persian Empire by Alexander and the Hellenization of the regions in Bactria, a strong Hellenistic influence is undeniable, especially in northwest India.

Just as in China Confucius raised the question about the right way to live, in India the Buddha made human suffering and the possibility of overcoming it the core of his teachings.⁵⁰ However, asceticism and a life detached from the world, notwithstanding their importance for the spiritual life, by no means shaped all of Indian civilization. The literature includes, alongside the large and often voluminous epics, texts that described individual fields of knowledge. Famous are Panini's *Grammar* (probably fifth century BCE) or Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, a treatise on statecraft. Already Megasthenes, who journeyed to India around 300 BCE as an envoy of Seleucus I and wrote an ethnographic work about India, reported that natural philosophy (*physiologia*) and astronomy existed in India.⁵¹ The natural doctrine put forth in Vaisheshika (about 500 CE) advanced views that resembled Greek atomism: there were four elements (earth, water, fire, air), each of which was composed of aggregates of imperceptibly small elements. Reality is grasped by means of six categories: substance, quality, activity, generality, particularity, inherence.⁵² Fundamental insights were achieved in various fields of knowledge. That is true, for example, of astronomy, which was influenced by the Greeks, as is evident from the adoptions of Greek terminology in Indian texts. Around 500 CE, the heavenly movements were explained by the rotation of the earth around its own axis. Concern about health led to the development of a system of medicine that still knew magical incantations, but was based on the use of medicinal herbs and remedies.⁵³

With the beginning of urbanization, a differentiated trade sector took shape. As we learn from the account of Megasthenes, a strict separation into social strata existed early on in India. Like peasants and herders, craftsmen formed a caste; according to Megasthenes, weapons' smiths and ship carpenters were paid by the king. Carpenters, potters, and smiths are attested in Indian texts; craftsmen worked in copper, bronze, as well as gold and

49 Heinrich G. Franz (ed.), *Das Alte Indien: Geschichte und Kultur des indischen Subkontinents* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1990), pp. 278–79.

50 Ainslie Thomas Embree and Friedrich Wilhelm, *Indien: Geschichte des Subkontinents von der Induskultur bis zum Beginn der englischen Herrschaft* (Frankfurt: Fischer-Bücherei, 1967), pp. 45–49; Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India* (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 46–49; and Kulke and Rothermund, *Geschichte Indiens*, pp. 72–73.

51 Strabo, 15,1,70 and 15,1,59. For Megasthenes: Embree and Wilhelm, *Indien*, pp. 65–69.

52 Walter Slaje, "Die brahmanisch-orthodoxe Scholastik," in Franz (ed.), *Das Alte Indien*, pp. 268–69.

53 Embree and Wilhelm, *Indien*, pp. 136–38, and Wolpert, *A New History of India*, p. 84.

silver. For the development of Indian civilization, the ability of craftsmen to forge iron and make iron tools was of great importance, as the use of iron axes attested since the eighth century was a precondition for clearing the previously impenetrable jungle and creating new areas under cultivation. Iron working was at an extraordinarily high level: probably in the fourth century CE, smiths were able to produce a high pillar of non-corroding iron that still stands today.⁵⁴ Potters were familiar with the potter's wheel, and the fortification of cities with brick walls more than 10 meters high demonstrates the advances in building technology. House construction used chiefly wood as building material, which is why India's early buildings for the most part no longer exist. Buddhist cult sites (stupa), however, attest to the skill in stone working; monumental cave temples were chiseled into the rock in pilgrimage centers and decorated with rich sculptural ornamentation. Agriculture made use of the ox-drawn plow and the iron plowshare; rice cultivation played an important role especially in the river valleys of southern India.

One distinctive feature of India was the capacity of Indians to catch Asia's largest land mammal, the elephant, tame it, and use it for various tasks, including in agriculture. Large numbers of elephants were also utilized in war: according to Pliny, one Indian king had 700 war elephants.⁵⁵ During Alexander's campaigns, Greeks and Macedonians were confronted with war elephants first in the battle of Gaugamela in 331 against the Persian king, and then in the battle against the Indian king Poros, who controlled a kingdom on the Indus. Thanks to a surprise attack, Alexander's army was able to prevail against the Indian muster of horsemen and elephants, but a permanent conquest of northwest India proved impossible.⁵⁶ Later, the Hellenistic kings adopted the elephants from India and deployed them in their battles over hegemony in the Eastern Mediterranean and the East. In the third century, King Pyrrhus of Epirus used elephants in his war against Rome, but military success eluded him. Elephants were an element of Indian culture, and the taming of these mighty animals shows what kind of potential of the mastery of nature Indian civilization possessed.

India made a fundamental contribution to modern science in mathematics. Indian numerals could be used to represent numbers in such a way that the

54 Kulke and Rothermund, *Geschichte Indiens*, p. 55; A. V. Balasubramanian, "Metallurgy in India," in Selin (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science*, pp. 728–30; and Franz (ed.), *Das Alte Indien*, pp. 333–42.

55 Plinius, *Naturalis Historia*, 6,66 and 6,68: 9000 elephants.

56 Arrian, *Anabasis* [History of Alexander], Gaugamela: 3,11,6, and India: 5,9,1, 5,10,1–3, and 5,15,4.

position of the individual numerals indicated the number in question. This positional system required a symbol 0. The decimal system with the numeral 0 was described by Varāhamihira and Brahmagupta in the sixth and seventh centuries; it was far more efficient than the use of the Greek letter numbers, was adopted by the Arabs and eventually, through the mediation of the Arab world, introduced into Europe.⁵⁷

Conclusion

The rapid expansion of the Arabs into widespread regions of Afro-Eurasia during the seventh and eighth centuries brought about a fundamental change in the political and cultural conditions from the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa all the way to Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia, and India. This created the preconditions for the reception of the ancient philosophical, medical, and technical literature in the Arab-speaking world that began in the ninth century, and for the transfer of classical knowledge and philosophy to Christian Europe via Spain.

If one surveys the civilizations from Western Europe to northeast China, a number of structural convergences stand out. Greco-Roman, Indian, and Chinese civilization possessed the fundamental cultural technologies such as writing and a calendar. Urbanization gave rise to differentiated crafts, which attained a high level of sophistication especially in the area of metallurgy and ceramic production. The societies of the West, India, and China had the technical and organizational competence to erect monumental buildings, especially also in the area of infrastructure. Agriculture had enough productivity to provide the urban population centers with food and raw materials, for example for textile manufacturing (wool, cotton), and the economy as a whole with work animals. Work was substantially performed by human and animal muscle power. The labor power of oxen, which pulled the plow, was the indispensable foundation of all civilizations in the West, the Near East, and Asia. The first steps toward the utilization of water power existed in the *Imperium Romanum* and in China, but there were few areas of use: in the Mediterranean, for example, water power was used before late antiquity chiefly to grind grain. Technological treatises existed for individual areas, and various individuals made the attempt to improve the existing tools, implements, or processes. For ancient Greece one should mention in this context

⁵⁷ Embree and Wilhelm, *Indien*, p. 138; G. G. Joseph, "Mathematics in India," in Selin (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science*, pp. 634–37; and Takao Hayashi, "Number Theory in India," in Selin (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science*, pp. 784–86.

chiefly mechanics, which, as a markedly application-oriented discipline, led to new insights in the field of technology. Especially the formulation and derivation of the law of the lever and the systematics of mechanical instruments contributed to an expansion of technological knowledge and were not without importance for the development of mechanics in the early modern period.

The attempts at grasping the world in a rational way were often closely related to the system of reckoning time and the calendar. At all times the observation of the heavenly bodies, of the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars, also had the function of interpreting constellations as omens and of accurately predicting lunar or solar eclipses. A real cosmological model was created by the Greeks, but the Chinese also achieved great successes in this area. Other relevant fields of knowledge in the Greek world as well as in China and India were medicine and mathematics.

Many cultural and technological developments in the Mediterranean, East Asia, and South Asia took place independently. But it is clear that the relationships between the cultures were crucially deepened by the expansion of the Persians and later of the Macedonians under Alexander toward the east. This created a zone of reciprocal influence especially in the regions of Bactria and northwest India. An important role was also played by the trade with prestige goods like silk and ivory or spices, and the resulting contacts in port cities or the trading centers of the Silk Roads between merchants from different cultures. Such contacts and connections created in North Africa, Europe, the East, and East Asia the rudiments of a world in which the cultures influenced one another through reception, the transfer of knowledge, and the adoption of individual technologies. All the differences and contrasts notwithstanding, a uniform culture of knowledge emerged, one that critically deepened further still in the centuries that followed.

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Discourses on gender and sexuality

SCOTT WELLS AND PING YAO

Traditional discourses on gender and sexuality, even as they helped shape the processes of urbanization, commercialization and state-building in the ancient world, were themselves profoundly affected by the growth of political, economic, and religious networks across Eurasia and northern Africa between 1200 BCE and 900 CE. In this chapter, we explore the ways in which the development of states and trans-regional networks shaped how gender roles and sexual relations were perceived, prescribed, inculcated, and represented during these two millennia. We first examine literary representations of masculinity and femininity in “world-encompassing” genres like epic and romance, showing how imaginative models of male and female behavior increased in variety and complexity in conjunction with the evolution of trans-regional political and economic networks. This is followed by a related discussion of the reasons for and significance of the proliferation of women writers in conjunction with state formation and increasing literacy. The diversification of voices and models is also evident in medical, moral, philosophical, and spiritual discourses, which are covered in the following sections of the essay on the well-being of the body, the definitions of the exemplary spouse, and religious understandings of sex and gender. Finally, we examine the emergence of explicitly erotic texts, including an “art of the bedchamber,” that was a distinguishing feature of the cosmopolitan cultures associated with well-established and urbanized states and empires.

Model men and women in epic, romance, and poetry

Literature produced in this axial age of empire-building, state-formation, and expanded commercial networks across Eurasia frequently expressed a longing for the end of conflict and competition, either in the restoration of a lost golden age or in the achievement of a promised but not yet attained future.

The restoration or achievement of perfect gender and sexual relations was an essential part of this vision, as well as the need to confront the possibility that attaining the desired goal would prove impossible.

One of the characteristic genres of the period was the verse epic of multinational war fought over a woman, or a conflict generated by the difficulties of sexual reproduction and inheritance. In the *Mahabharata* (c. 400 CE in its final form, but with the core narrative dating back to before 500 BCE), the Pandava brothers fight against their first cousins, the sons of Dhritarashtra, for the throne of the Kurus in a war caused by the royal line's inability to produce an undisputed line of succession. By the end of the conflict, which brings together all the rulers of the subcontinent, virtually all the participants except the Pandava brothers themselves are annihilated, and in the end the kingdom remains without a clear heir. In the *Ramayana* (c. 300 BCE in the version attributed to Valmiki), a war is fought over the abduction of Rama's wife Sita by the demon-king Ravana, as the Trojan War was instigated by Paris's abduction of Helen. In both of these conflicts, the abducted woman is restored to her legitimate husband, but with doubts remaining about the costs of war and the purity of the abducted woman. The wrath of Achilles that forms the subject of the *Iliad* (c. eighth century BCE) is prompted first against the Greeks because of Agamemnon's theft of his concubine Chryseis, and then against the Trojans after Hector slays his lover and intimate companion Patroclus. Achilles overcomes his wrath, but only by recognizing that his loss of Patroclus is mirrored by King Priam's loss of his son Hector, and the war itself continues. In the *Odyssey* (c. eighth century BCE), Odysseus makes a long, difficult, and destructive return from war, losing all of his men and having been delayed several times by erotic relationships with women other than his wife: Circe, Calypso, Nausicaa. Upon his eventual return to Ithaca, he must slaughter all the elite single men of the island as competitors to the hand of his wife Penelope. In the *Aeneid* of Virgil (70–21 BCE), the eponymous hero loses his first wife in the conflagration at Troy, and at Jupiter's command must abandon his would-be second wife Dido at Carthage, where she commits suicide. Aeneas must fight yet another war in Latium to win his destined bride Lavinia against her mother's wishes and despite the fact that she is already promised to someone. The epic ends not with the expected marriage, but with the ambiguous morality of Aeneas' killing of Lavinia's earlier betrothed, Turnus. In the Persian epic narrative of Rostam and Sohrab, preserved as part of the *Shahnameh* of Ferdowsi (c. 935 – c. 1020), a father and son fight on opposing sides of a war between two states, their identities unknown to

one another; the father kills the son and condemns himself to die without an heir.¹

Separation due to constant wars or forced relocations was also a prominent theme in the early Chinese poems collected in *The Book of Songs*. These often speak in the voice of a wife or consort left alone because of her husband's long service in the state's wars, bewailing, "My lord is on service, how can I not be sad?" (a poem in *Airs of the Royal Domain*),² or lamenting, "For whom should I want to look nice?" ("Bo Is Brave," in *Airs of the Wei*).³ The military expansion under the first two Chinese empires, Qin and Han, gave birth to a particular poetic form called "The Song of the Yan" (*Yan ge xing*), in which the (usually male) poet expressed a woman's longing for her husband, who had been drafted to garrison the distant northern frontier region of Yan. The earliest extant "Song of Yan" was authored by Cao Pi (187–226 CE), Emperor Wendi of the State of Wei (220–266), and the form continued to be a popular poetry exercise during the Tang Empire. Gao Shi's (706–765) "Song of the Yan," for example, laments that "the young wife at home is heartbroken, the soldier husband in the northern frontier turning his head in vain." Though women were rarely allowed to fight on the battlefield after the Shang Dynasty, heroic female warriors of post-Shang eras did appear in historical writings and literature. The most popular of these heroines was the renowned Mulan, daughter of an aging draftee, who fought the nomads of the northern steppe for twelve years under the disguise of a male soldier during the Northern Wei Dynasty (386–534 CE). The beloved story was vividly told in *The Ballad of Mulan*, a lengthy sixth-century poem.

If many of the verse epics and ballads respond to state-formation and increased trans-regional networks and conflicts by describing the effects of war on gender relations, other literary genres emerged in this period that emphasized different themes, particularly in states and empires where warrior elites were replaced with or supplemented by bureaucratic elites of scribes and literati. These new genres constructed new ideals of masculinity and femininity, and tended to emphasize greater parity and balance between the sexes, including concern with the proper understanding and fulfillment of erotic and emotional attachments between men and women in a complex

1 Wendy Doniger, *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India* (University of Chicago Press, 1999); Patrick Colm Hogan, "The Epilogue of Suffering: Heroism, Empathy, Ethics," *SubStance* 30 (2001): 119–43; and A. M. Keith, *Engendering Rome: Women in Latin Epic* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

2 Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs: The Ancient Chinese Classic of Poetry* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), p. 56.

3 Waley, *The Book of Songs*, p. 53.

and dangerous world. In the Greek world, this shift can already be witnessed in the differences between the *Iliad*, set at the siege of Troy and dominated by descriptions of combat between men, and the journey of the hero's return to and reception at home in the *Odyssey*, a narrative in which many of the most memorable and well-developed characters are women.⁴ A new gender dynamic is particularly evident, however, in the new and popular genre of the Greek novel, which began to be written during the first centuries CE at the heyday of the *pax Romana*. They present that world as far from peaceful. The heroes of the novel are always a pair: an innocent young man and woman of high status who fall in love only to be separated by courtesans, pirates, bandits, soldiers, merchants, healers, priests, magicians, and jealous love-rivals in a series of misadventures that often find the loving pair seeking one another throughout the major ports and religious centers of the Eastern Roman Empire, places like Tyre, Alexandria, Delphi, and Ephesus. The young man and still-virginal woman find bliss only when they manage to return home together, get married, and stay put.⁵

The novelistic biblical books of Judith and Esther (fourth–second century BCE) narrate the hazards faced by the Jews in a world of aggressive empires, and praise Jewish women who skillfully develop and manipulate an erotic relationship with an enemy general or Persian emperor to rescue the Hebrew people from the dangers posed by that foreign leader.⁶ Early Christian stories of apostles, hermits, and martyrs similarly narrated the threats and stumbling blocks posed by commerce, empire, and the obligations of mundane social and economic networks, and portrayed holy men and women who had redirected their erotic attachment away from the world and its pleasures to God and the delights of the afterlife.⁷ Contemporaneous Tamil and Sanskrit romances from South Asia, such as Kalidasa's play *The Recognition of Shakuntala* (fifth century CE) and the verse narrative *Shilappadikaram* attributed to Ilango Adigal (third century CE), describe the happy marriage of a couple, and then narrate the separation of that couple by the jealousy, temptations and status-consciousness of the human world of cities, trade,

4 Beth Cohen (ed.), *The Distaff Side: Representing the Female in Homer's Odyssey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), and Richard Heitman, *Taking Her Seriously: Penelope and the Plot of Homer's Odyssey* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

5 Meriel Jones, *Playing the Man: Performing Masculinities in the Ancient Greek Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

6 Lawrence M. Wills (ed. and trans.), *Ancient Jewish Novels: An Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

7 Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

and states. The couples are reunited, but only to face further suffering; lasting happiness can be found only through the redirection of desire to the goal of liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth.⁸ In Chinese and Japanese literature, however, erotic pleasure is usually represented as entirely good, in accord with the Daoist, Tantric, and Mahayana Buddhist ideas about the positive spiritual qualities unleashed through sexual intercourse, as well as with the cultivation of sensual pleasures advocated in the sexual manuals authored by Tang literati. In the “Poetic Essay on Great Bliss,” for example, Bo Xingjian (776–826) depicts a pair of newlyweds who felt increasingly harmonious with each other after exploring their intimacy in various settings (music, room decoration, fine foods, etc.) throughout spring, summer, autumn, and winter.⁹

The first millennium CE witnessed a transformation of ideal masculinity and femininity in Chinese literature as well. While in early poetic works, battlefield heroes were idolized, the protagonist in Tang vernacular literature was typically a literary man who passed the civil service examination and held imperial or regional offices. Similarly, early Chinese poems emphasized women’s physical appearance (such as facial features) and attire, with such ideal beauty usually being portrayed as enchanting yet elusive. The most frequently used phrases are: silkworm eyebrows (*mei*), beautiful eyes (*meimu*), white teeth (*haochi*), red lips (*zhuchun*), jade-like fingers (*yuzhi*), artful smiles (*qiaoxiao*), light skirts (*qingju*), fragrant dress (*xunyi*), and slender waist (*xiyao*). A Han poem, for example, laments that “the beauty is in the clouds; the path to the sky is forever blocked.”¹⁰ The *Book of Songs*, Qu Yuan’s (c. 340–279 BCE) *The Songs of the South* (*Chuci*), and *New Songs From a Jade Terrace* (*Yutai xin yong*), a collection of poems from the Eastern Zhou period (771–221 BCE) to the Liang Dynasty (501–57) compiled by Xu Ling (507–83), contain many descriptions of so-called *jiaren*, the image of the beautiful but unattainable woman.

The open attitude toward sexuality during the Tang Dynasty would eventually expand the repertoire of how women were depicted (see Fig. 7.1). In addition to graphic narratives in erotica, Tang poems ventured to adore the

8 Kalidasa, *The Recognition of Sakuntala*, trans. W. J. Johnson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), and Ilango Adigal, *Shilappadikaram* (*The Ankle Bracelet*), trans. Alain Danielou (New York: New Directions, 1964).

9 Ping Yao, “Historicizing Great Bliss: Erotica in Tang China (618–907),” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 22 (2013): 207–29.

10 Xu Ling, *Yutai xin yong jianzhu*, ed. Wu Zhaoyi (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), p. 20.

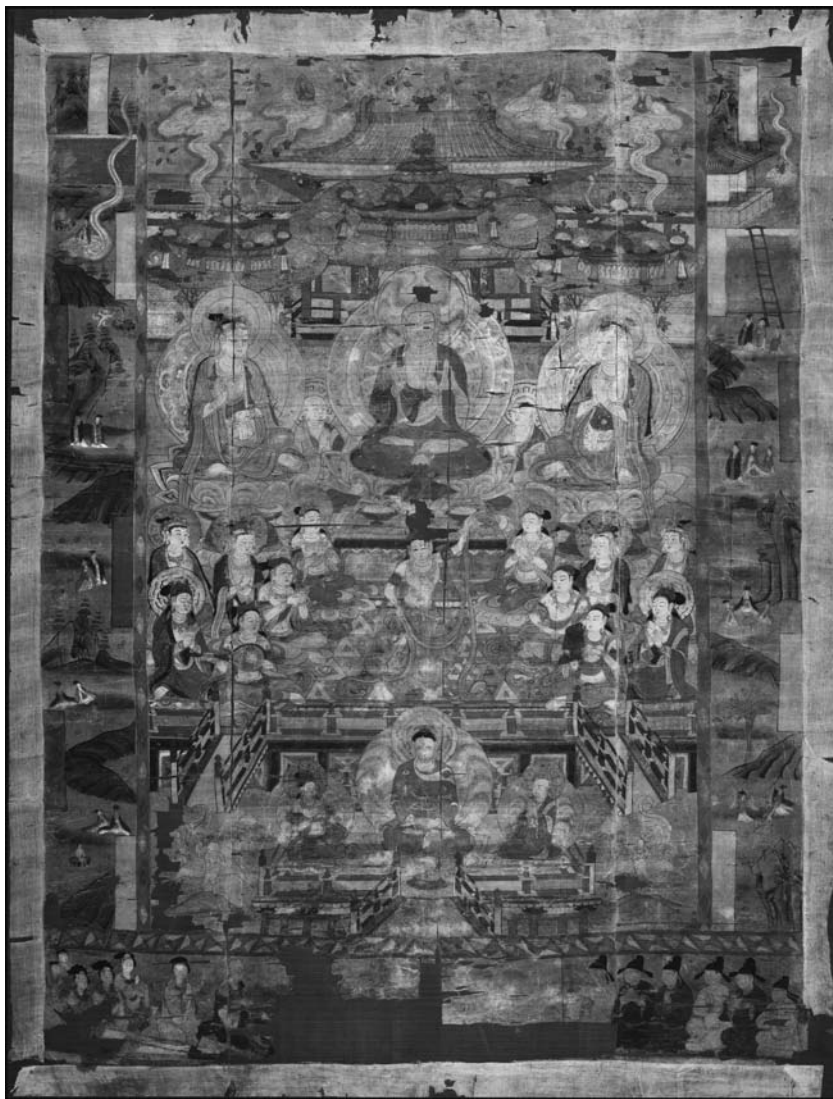


Figure 7.1 Tang dynasty painting of the Paradise of Sakyamuni. Below Sakyamuni are musicians and dancers with low-cut, tight dresses. © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

sight of half-exposed bosoms (Bo Juyi, "The Song of Wu Palace")¹¹ or hotspring-bathed female flesh (Bo Juyi, "The Song of Everlasting Lament").¹²

The biggest change in Tang literature's idealizing femininity, however, is the pairing of physical beauty with literary ability, a trend particularly noticeable in the emergence of popular literature that envisions a female readership. In "The Tale of Yingying" (*Yingying zhuan*) by Yuan Zhen (779–831), for example, Yingying not only is extraordinarily beautiful in appearance, but also "excels in writing." She would "often ponder over verses."¹³ In "The Tale of Nanke Governor" (*Nanke taishou zhuan*) by Li Gongzuo (c. 770–850), the protagonist Chunyu Fen meets a group of women who are bewitchingly pretty and speak eloquently.¹⁴ And in Shen Yazhi's (781–832) "Xing Feng," Beauty, the female protagonist, is described as "walking in a composed and leisurely manner, holding books and reciting poems" and identifies herself as a poetry lover.¹⁵ The depiction of bookish beauty as an idealized trait of femininity is very much parallel to the rise of a literati elite of men educated to pass the Civil Service Exam, and women educated to be teachers to their sons and companions to their husbands. As the men of the state bureaucracy prized poetry, the most prestigious subject in the examination system, they also idolized the learned woman who could share and appreciate their knowledge.

Women as writers

Women, indeed, wrote, and their writing on gender relations and sexuality can be found in a variety of the genres that emerged in the context of states, empires, and networks. Sappho's lyrics (seventh century BCE) make several references to themes from the Homeric epic. One of the longer surviving fragments of her poetry describes in joyous terms the arrival of Andromache at Troy and her marriage to Hector, which is starkly in contrast with how the war between Greeks and Trojans would transform this happiness into sorrow with Hector's slaying by Achilles, followed by the murder of their son Astyanax and Andromache's own enslavement after Troy's defeat. The epigrams of the Greek poet Anyte (c. 300 BCE) eloquently and sincerely praise

11 Bo Juyi, *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, ed. Zhu Jincheng (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), vol. 11, p. 1123.

12 Bo Juyi, *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, vol. 11, p. 659.

13 Li Fang (ed.), *Taiping guangji* (Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994), vol. 1v, p. 556.

14 Li Fang (ed.), *Taiping guangji*, vol. 1v, p. 483.

15 Li Fang (ed.), *Taiping guangji*, vol. 111, p. 125.

the bravery of men who die in battle for their fatherland, though one poem, perhaps wrongly attributed to her, commemorates three virgins of Miletus who committed suicide rather than face capture by the invading Gauls.¹⁶ The Roman woman Vibia Perpetua (d. 203 CE), while in prison awaiting execution as a Christian, recorded how her father attempted to use his love for her, and her responsibilities to her family and infant son, to dissuade her from accepting martyrdom. Her dreams helped her reaffirm her commitment to the new faith and rejection of both Roman norms and the claims of kin and home by showing how her martyrdom would redeem her deceased younger brother from postmortem suffering and symbolically transform her from a maternal woman to a warrior man.¹⁷ Such rejections of family and home in favor of dedication to God or a higher spiritual calling can also be found in mystical poetry by Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu women, such as Rabi'a (eighth century CE), Patacara (sixth century BCE), and Antal (eighth century CE).¹⁸

Elite women of Tang China and Heian Japan wrote both poems and essays. Although many of their writings tended to conform to the themes of their male counterparts, others reflected a distinctive theme of longing for sisterhood: the cultivation of networks among women in a male-dominated society. The Tang Daoist poetess Yu Xuanji (844–868) composed several poems celebrating women's beauty as a means of establishing emotional rather than sexual intimacy. For instance, Yu expresses amazement at the outward beauty of three sisters who lived next door to her convent. She highlights a sense of camaraderie and pride in shared femininity, by imagining that these sisters chose to be born as women: "coming in exile to this dusty world, they did not become males." She claimed, "If I were looking at their pink faces, even dying would be sweet."¹⁹ In Heian Japan, discouraged from learning men's writing (Chinese), women conveyed their thoughts, emotions, and observations using *hiragana*, the set of alphabetic characters developed during the ninth century and associated specifically with women

16 Diane Rayor (trans.), *Sappho's Lyre: Archaic Lyric and Women Poets of Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), and Ellen Greene, (ed.), *Women Poets in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005).

17 Kate Cooper, "A Father, a Daughter and a Procurator: Authority and Resistance in the Prison Memoir of Perpetua of Carthage," *Gender & History* 23 (2011): 685–702.

18 Margaret Smith, *Rabi'a the Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints in Islam* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Kathryn R. Blackstone, *Women in the Footsteps of the Buddha: Struggle for Liberation in the Therigatha* (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 1998); and Archana Venkatesan, *The Secret Garland: Antal's Tiruppavai and Nacciya Tirumoli* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

19 Suzanne Cahill, "Material Culture and the Dao: Textiles, Boats, and Zithers in the Poetry of Yu Xuanji (844–868)," in Livia Kohn and Harold D. Roth (eds.), *Daoist Identity: History, Lineage, and Ritual* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), pp. 102–26.

as a shared community of writers and readers. These texts demonstrated a quite subtle, sophisticated, yet unrestrained self-expression. By the end of the tenth century, Japan would produce renowned female poets, Lady Ise (?–959) and Izumi Shikibu (b. c. 976), as well as the prose masters Sei Shōnagon (c. 966–1017), author of *The Pillow Book*, and Murasaki Shikibu (973–1014?), author of the *Tale of Genji*, which describes an aesthetically and erotically sophisticated court where men and women interact as equals in intellect, sensibility, and shouldering the burdens of moral responsibility for how they treat one another.

While women writers remained far fewer than men through the period from 1200 BCE to 900 CE, their numbers always grew in contexts where state bureaucracies, court and civic cultures, and developing commerce gave increased prominence and value to literacy. A greater number of literate women led to more women writing. Equally importantly, the greatness of authors like Sappho and Murasaki Shikibu was widely acknowledged among both men and women, and they became literary models for subsequent writers, both male and female.²⁰

Sex, health, and well-being

Trans-regional networks connected human beings across communities and cultures, and thereby created trans-regional relations of gender and sexuality. Trans-regional moral and ethical discourses arose to articulate and manage these new relations in the form of philosophical systems, cultic practices, and religious beliefs which claimed a universal validity that transcended local particularities and therefore made sense of the diversity of the sexual practices and gender identities that had been interconnected by expanding states, empires, and trade routes. Some of these discourses identified the reproductive conjugal bond as the universal norm for gender relations and sexual practices. Some emphasized the equality of all human beings with respect to aspirations focused on meeting the needs of the mind, spirit, or soul which every woman and man shared alike despite physical differences in their bodies. Still others endeavored to articulate and define the parameters and

20 Dolores O'Higgins, "Sappho's Splintered Tongue: Silence in Sappho 31 and Catullus 51," in Ellen Greene (ed.), *Re-Reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 68–78; Alexander E. W. Hall, "'And Cythera Smiled': Sappho, Hellenistic Poetry, and Virgil's Elusive Mechanics," *The American Journal of Philology* 132 (2011): 615–31; and Joe Parker, "Dreaming Gender: Kyōgoku School Japanese Women Poets (Re)Writing the Feminine Subject," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 27 (2007): 259–89.

implications of sexual practices and pleasure. The major universal belief systems that emerged in this period weighed discourses that regarded non-procreative sex as aberrant against those that regarded sexual reproduction as a lesser good, even a distraction or impediment to achieving the higher spiritual goal, and came up with a variety of solutions and compromises.

In the Greco-Roman world, the healthy male body was regarded as firm, hot, and dry, while the female body was soft, cold, and wet. In sexual reproduction, the heat and energy of the male semen warmed the damp womb, and the conceived offspring fructified there like the seed of a plant in damp, heated earth. In this scientific discourse, any behaviors that challenged this norm – virile women, effeminate men, hermaphrodites – were deviations from the ideal universal type. Effeminate men include those who indulged too much in sex, because, instead of being dry and hard like a true man, they produced and leaked excessive fluid through frequent intercourse. Greek and Roman ethnographers such as Herodotus (c. 484–425 BCE), Strabo (c. 64 BCE – c. 21 CE), and Tacitus (56 CE – c. 120 CE) used this model to categorize the diversity of cultures (real and imaginary) with which their world came into contact. These historians and geographers lauded any practices that approximated the norm while chiding, marginalizing, critiquing, or condemning practices that deviated, effeminate Persians and virile Amazons being the best-known examples.²¹

Greek and Roman philosophers likewise offered understandings of gender and sexuality presented as universally applicable. While Aristotle (384–322 BCE) argued that men were both physically, mentally, and spiritually superior to women, other schools argued that the human intellect transcended gender differences and took as their goal liberation of the mind from the desires of the body. The Pythagorean emphasis on contemplating the harmonious geometry that underlay the perfect proportions of the universe allowed men and women to participate as equals, and several writings survive by and attributed to female Pythagoreans from the sixth century BCE through the Hellenistic Era.²² Platonic dialogues and neo-Platonist writings present the material world and its sexual reproduction as distractions that prevent

21 Sophia M. Connell, "Aristotle and Galen on Sex Difference and Reproduction: A New Approach to an Ancient Rivalry," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 31 (1999): 405–27; François Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); and Danela Dueck, *Strabo of Amasia: A Greek Man of Letters in Augustan Rome* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

22 Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Pythagorean Women: Their History and Writings* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

human beings from recognizing their true spiritual nature or soul and its proper home in the non-material universe of ideas. In this respect, as Plato (429–347 BCE) argues in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, male–female sexual desire, because linked to reproduction, is actually inferior to male–male (or, by implication female–female) sexuality, in which the partners can more easily detach themselves from physical sex to recognize the true spiritual nature of their love, soul for soul rather than body for body. Women as well as men could achieve this philosophical mastery, at least in theory. Since men were encouraged to form relationships with other men rather than women, it may be that (like Plato himself) most Platonists took only male pupils: unlike the Pythagorean school, there are no surviving texts by Platonist women.²³

In early Chinese philosophical thinking, the use of metaphors and the terminology of sexual intercourse in such texts as *The Book of Songs* (*Shijing*, attributed to Confucius) and *The Zuo Commentaries* (*Zuozhuan*, compiled in the early fourth century BCE) reflect an openness and matter-of-fact attitude about sexuality in early China. The Han Dynasty witnessed a substantial increase in writings about gender and sexuality. The most important Han texts are undoubtedly the so-called Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts (*Mawangdui yishu*), the fifteen medical texts discovered at the Mawangdui Han tomb. Among them, “Ten Questions” (*Shiwen*), “Discourse on the Culminant Way under Heaven” (*Tianxia zhidao tian*), and “Conjoining Yin and Yang” (*He yinyang*) are explicit texts about the art of the bedchamber. These texts, along with rituals relevant to sexuality, represented the dominant discourse on sexuality in the Han and the earliest sexual culture in Chinese history. Universally associating the female body as *yin* and the male body as *yang*, the Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts have the distinctive tendency of combining Daoist beliefs with medical knowledge: some texts stress sexual intercourse as resembling the union of *yin* and *yang*, while others discuss its benefits for physical well-being.²⁴ Perceptions of gender and sexuality as seen in these texts are twofold. On the one hand, these texts emphasize the importance of the pleasure of the female partner during sex, and recommend that all human beings need a healthy balance of *yin-qi* and *yang-qi*, which can be achieved through male–female intercourse. On the other hand, the texts were clearly written for men: for the sex act to have any medical value, the male had to make sure that the female reached orgasm and

23 See, e.g., Frisbee Sheffield, *Plato's Symposium: The Ethics of Desire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

24 Donald Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Manuscripts: The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts* (London: Kegan Paul, 1998).

emitted her *yin-qi*. This probably is the main reason why there are so few instances in ancient Chinese literature of homoeroticism. Nevertheless, none of these texts addressed the moral issue of non-procreative sex versus sexual reproduction, probably because the Chinese did not consider that there could be much of a conflict between sexual pleasure and continuing the family line.

The exemplary spouse

In China during the Han Dynasty, intellectuals began to write treatises specifically for women on how they could best fulfill the responsibilities of their position in family and society. Most of these writings drew on Confucianism as the source of moral authority. Liu Xiang's (77–6 BCE) *Lienü zhuan* (Biographies of Exemplary Women), for example, showcases women in the past who were filial daughters and daughters-in-law, helpful wives to their husbands, or wise mothers to their sons. Liu also appended a chapter of "Depraved Favorites," listing evil and dangerous imperial consorts who destroyed their husband's empire. *Lienü* of this kind would eventually be included in every series of dynastic biographies and became a genre of its own. It served as moral guidance for women throughout Chinese imperial history.²⁵ Ban Zhao (45–116), sister of the renowned historian and Confucian moralist Ban Gu (32–92), authored *Nüjie* (Admonitions for Women), advocating seven womanly virtues as ideal for a future bride: humility, resignation, subservience, self-abasement, obedience, cleanliness, and industry.²⁶ During the Tang Dynasty, this "exemplary woman" tradition continued, with Ban Zhao's *Admonitions for Women* becoming a must-read for girls of elite families. In addition to such didactic classics, epitaph writing also served as a conduit of public discourse on women's role and womanly virtue. Compared to the women in *lienü* biographies who were known for their heroic actions, or to princesses remembered in dynastic biographies for the political consequences of their self-indulgence and waywardness, epitaphs exalted Tang elite women for their diligence, capability, and wisdom in managing domestic affairs, and for their literary and religious acumen. Accordingly, the seven womanly virtues defined by Ban Zhao were the most common attributes ascribed to the deceased.

25 See Lisa Ann Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

26 Nancy Lee Swann, *Pan Chao: Foremost Woman Scholar of China* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2001).

In the Greco-Roman world, Stoicism emerged in the Hellenistic period, providing an ethical system of guidelines for marriage and procreation in the context of a complex, interconnected world of kingdoms and empires. As Rome expanded and consolidated its empire between the first centuries BCE and CE, Stoicism was likewise adopted by many members of the Roman political class. Stoicism articulated a concept of male–female companionship in a loving, mutually supportive marriage. The self-control required to discipline the body and its desires, along with the related emotions of pleasure and suffering, was seen as essential to survival and success in a complex, large-scale society where genuine intimacies had to be carefully and deliberately cultivated. Stoicism emphasized the man’s obligation to fulfill his public duties and social responsibilities, including marrying and having children, but also to meet those obligations without ever losing self-control or behaving irrationally. The wife’s ethical responsibilities were to her marriage partner: she should exhibit moderation, and be a worthy friend to her husband. Faced with a disturbing or upsetting occurrence, such as the death of one of their children (not uncommon in this age of high infant and childhood mortality), the spouses were expected to support one another in accepting the circumstance with self-disciplined equanimity.²⁷

In India, Brahmanical religion developed two contrasting *dharma*s, or paths of moral and ethical instruction. Texts such as the *Laws of Manu* (roughly dated c. 200 BCE – 200 CE) and Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* (traditionally dated c. 300 BCE) perpetuated the Vedic tradition of caste hierarchy. These authorities emphasized male–female reproduction as the sexual and gendered norm, stipulating the sacred responsibility of men to engender and women to bear and nurture legitimate children of their *varna* or *jati*. The codes (or *dharmashastras*) explicitly condemn non-procreative sexuality as immoral and polluting, with acts like adultery and male–male sex harshly punished. The laws also highlight the subservience and inferiority of women to men. By contrast, the *Upanishads*, compiled between the tenth and fifth centuries BCE, emphasize the gender- and caste-neutrality of *brahman* (soul), universally shared by all beings. These texts instructed men and women in ascetic disciplinary practices (*yoga*) that would enable them to achieve liberation (*moksha*) from the sufferings, desires, and distractions of the material world and body. The contrasting paths of the *dharmashastras* and *Upanishads* were eventually reconciled in classical Hinduism by encouraging upper-caste men

27 Gretchen Reydam-Schils, *The Roman Stoics: Self, Responsibility, and Affection* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

first to fulfill their worldly *dharma* with their wives by producing and raising children to adulthood and then to withdraw from the world, seeking liberation through asceticism. Wives were expected to accompany their husbands into retreat for meditation and spiritual preparation, but orthodox Hindu doctrine argued that women could not achieve liberation. However, a woman could be born again as a man by fulfilling her wifely *dharma*, assisting her husband in the performance of his duties, and doing nothing that would bring him dishonor. Gender- and caste-neutrality was preserved in classical Hinduism primarily through the practice *bhakti*, or personal veneration of a deity, who would reward the loving, enamored devotee with ecstatic liberation.²⁸

Sex, gender, and religion

As the example of Hinduism highlights, the universalizing religions that emerged out of the cosmopolitan environment of states, empires, and networks both built upon and profoundly reshaped pre-existing discourses on sex and gender relations. The Greeks and Romans, for example, tried to universalize their religious beliefs and cultic practices by equating the gods and goddesses of other cultures with their own pantheon, including the gods and goddesses of peoples they conquered and integrated into their empire. So not only were the Olympian gods of the Greek pantheon merged with Roman deities, but their persons and cults were syncretized as far as possible with those of neighboring and subjugated peoples to the east (Egypt, Babylon) and north (Scythians, Celts, Germans).²⁹ Panhellenic devotions like the cult and oracle of Apollo at Delphi, and the celebration of the Mysteries in honor of Persephone and Demeter at Eleusis brought together men and women from throughout the Greek (and later Roman) world and beyond.³⁰ On the other hand, cultic practices whose gendered or sexual elements were regarded as without parallel in the Greco-Roman world were considered to fall outside

28 Kautilya, *The Arthashastra*, ed. and trans. L. N. Rangarajan (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1992); Brian Black, *The Character of the Self in Ancient India: Priests, Kings, and Women in the Early Upanishads* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007); and Arti Dhand, *Woman as Fire, Woman as Sage: Sexual Ideology in the Mahabharata* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).

29 See, e.g., Petra Pakkanen, *Interpreting Early Hellenistic Religion: A Study Based on the Mystery Cult of Demeter and the Cult of Isis* (Helsinki: Suomen Ateenan-instituutin säätiö, 1996), and Stephanie L. Budin, "A Reconsideration of the Aphrodite-Ashtart Syncretism," *Numen* 51 (2004): 95–145.

30 Matthew Dillon, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

the normal into the realm of the excessive. The supposed “sacred prostitution” that Greek authors claimed could be found at temples dedicated to love goddesses in Mesopotamia and Syria – the dedication of one’s body to having sex with devotees of the god – was one such practice much commented on as something alien and strange that demonstrated the effeminate excessive sexuality of the east. Sacred prostitution was practiced at the temple of Aphrodite in the Greek *polis* of Corinth as well, according to Strabo: further evidence, alongside its fondness for luxury, of that port city’s status as an Asiatic outlier.³¹

Other sexually transgressive foreign religious practices, however, were openly introduced into the center of Greek and Roman life, notably the devotion to Bacchus and to the *Magna Mater* (the Great Mother, Cybele). While associated with fertility, these “eastern” imports explicitly encouraged devotees to achieve an ecstatic state of erotic and mystical attachment to the divinity by inverting the normal gender roles: women by aggressively pursuing Bacchus through the wilderness beyond the bounds of household and *polis*, men by donning women’s clothing and even castrating themselves in the service of Cybele. These practices, by reversing “universal” gender norms, both reinforced the idea of those norms as universal *and* presented an intensely shared homosocial devotion to the god (men among men, women among women) as an alternative to the production of offspring.³² The similarly imported cult of the Persian god Mithras, whose adherents were almost exclusively men, offered to male devotees the promise of individual immortality by participating in the homosocial rites of the god. Mithraism became popular in the Roman army during the late first and early second centuries CE, exactly the period when Roman law required soldiers to remain unmarried for their entire term of service. Devotion to Mithras within the Roman army remained widespread, however, even after the marriage-prohibition on soldiers was lifted in the early third century CE, and continued until the Christianization of the Roman Empire over the course of the fourth century.³³

31 Mary Beard and John Henderson, “With This Body I Thee Worship: Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity,” *Gender & History* 9 (1997): 480–503.

32 Ross Shepard Kraemer (ed.), *Women’s Religions in the Greco-Roman World: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 12–36 and 283–92, and Will Roscoe, “Priests of the Goddess: Gender Transgression in Ancient Religion,” *History of Religions* 35 (1996): 195–230.

33 Manfred Clauss, *The Roman Cult of Mithras: The God and His Mysteries*, trans. Richard Gordon (New York: Routledge, 2000), and Brian Campbell, “The Marriage of Soldiers under the Empire,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 68 (1978): 153–66.

Christianity, while having its roots in Judaism, drew on Stoicism, neo-Platonism, Zoroastrianism, and other philosophical and religious systems in articulating its own emphasis on the norm of male–female reproductive sex, including the subordination of woman to man, simultaneously with an articulation of the human soul and its pursuit of salvation as gender-neutral phenomena that transcended and rejected sexuality. Christianity condemned non-procreative sex, highlighted the woman’s primary worldly and public function as that of wife and mother, and embraced the definition of adultery as sex between a married woman and a man other than her husband. If a wife had sexual intercourse with anyone other than her husband, she was therefore an adulteress; whereas a husband who had sex with women other than his wife, including prostitutes, would be guilty of the less serious offense of fornication as long as those women were unmarried. The Church Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries CE privileged the needs of the soul over the desires of the body, but also tended to gender the virtuous, ascetic soul as manly and the weak, corrupting body as feminine. Women were seen as having an additional hurdle to overcome in their pursuit of spiritual athleticism, because of the greater softness and porousness of their bodies. The polluting essence of women’s menstruating bodies was part of the justification (following Mosaic law) for excluding women from access to the altar and priestly office. Nevertheless, both men and women could dedicate their chastity or virginity to God, abandoning or foregoing sexual reproduction for the higher purpose of joining in a shared spiritual struggle. Without considering sexual reproduction to be evil (though the discharge of semen, like menstruation, was polluting), Christians shared with Zoroastrianism and Gnosticism a vision of the cosmos as a battleground between the forces of light and darkness. For Christian ascetics, abstention from sexual activity constituted, alongside martyrdom, one of the two most important ways of engaging in this fight on the side of good. Groups of monks and nuns, living in monasteries as sacred warriors dedicated to spiritual combat on behalf of all the faithful, became the defining feature of the Christian landscape in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages.³⁴

34 Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Lynda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Gender and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); Lynda L. Coon, “Somatic Styles of the Early Middle Ages,” *Gender & History* 20 (2008): 463–86; Kate Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Mathew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (University of Chicago Press, 2001); and Kristen E. Kvam, Linda S. Shearing, and Valarie H. Ziegler

The idea of an ascetic monastic elite was also a defining feature of Buddhism. The first Buddhist communities of monks and nuns were established by the Buddha himself, part of the general emergence of monasticism in India between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE also associated with Jainism. Buddhist monks and nuns were expected to dedicate themselves entirely to the cessation of desire, the cultivation of right action by overcoming all negative emotions such as anger and hatred, and the achievement of correct mental concentration by replacing ignorance with knowledge. Through this process of meditation and study, monks and nuns could achieve enlightenment, and gain wisdom they could communicate to others through preaching and writing. Laypeople, living in the world as husbands, wives, and householders, would gain inspiration and merit by attending monastic sermons and by providing the monks and nuns with material support. The positive *karma* accrued through these good works would help laymen and women eventually achieve enlightenment themselves, usually after subsequent rebirth.³⁵

Islam shared the same roots as Christianity, and the same emphasis on a universal struggle between good and evil, but produced a discourse on gender and sexuality that (like rabbinic Judaism) embraced the pleasures of male–female reproductive intercourse as an absolute good. In the system articulated in the Quran, and developed in the schools of Islamic law that emerged between the seventh and ninth centuries CE, all men and women were expected to get married and produce offspring. Non-procreative sex was forbidden as polluting, and a man who could not afford the bride-gift or dower to marry a free woman was instructed to wed a slave. Christianity's lauding of celibacy and asceticism was one of the principal critiques Islam made of that religion, alongside the worship of Jesus as God: the Qur'an stipulates that the delights of sex will continue to be enjoyed by the saved in paradise. In the context of the male–female reproductive union, women could inherit and manage their own property as they wished, while men were expected to use their financial resources to benefit their wives. Men could have up to four wives, while women could have no more than one husband; but the male's right to polygyny was contingent on his being able to

(eds.), *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

35 Mohan Wijayaratna, *Buddhist Monastic Life: According to the Texts of the Theravada Tradition*, trans. Claude Grangier and Steven Collins (Cambridge University Press, 1996), and Mohan Wijayaratna, *Buddhist Nuns: The Birth and Development of a Women's Monastic Order* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2010).

support all the wives equally, emotionally and sexually as well as financially. Extramarital sex was absolutely forbidden to women, but allowed for a man with his unmarried slaves in the form of concubinage. The spiritual practices associated with right belief – prayer, alms, fasting, pilgrimage – were incumbent on all Muslims equally; and the mystical path of Sufism was also open to both genders. But in mundane public matters, women were subordinate to men.³⁶

In China, post-Han discussions of the “life nurturing” benefits of sex began to incorporate the Daoist concept of uniting *yin* and *yang* through intercourse. The most influential texts during the post-Han era were *Sunüjing* (Scripture of the Plain Woman), *Yufang bijue* (Secret Instructions of the Jade Bedchamber), and *Huangtingjing* (Scripture of the Yellow Court) of the third or fourth century, as well as *Shangqing huangshu guodu yi* (Liturgy of Passage of the Yellow Writ of Highest Clarity), which dates to the fourth or fifth century. All of these reflect a profound Daoist influence on the art of the bedchamber as well as on perceptions of sexuality in early medieval China. Some scholars argue that since Daoism considers attaining *yin-qi* crucial for reaching this-worldly immortality, and since sexual intercourse constitutes a prominent technique to reach this goal, early literature on the art of the bedchamber appeared to promote a sexual vampirism of women by men. Other scholars cite texts such as *The Liturgy of Passage of the Yellow Writ of Highest Clarity* as evidence that women were considered critical and “functioned as equal partners” in the early Daoist tradition. In this *Liturgy*, sexual intercourse was stipulated as part of the ritual of Daoist initiation. The sexual component of this process was called “the harmonization of *qi*” (*heqi*), that is, combining the male’s sexual energy (yellow *qi*) with the female’s sexual energy (red *qi*) to realize the harmony of the universe. Whether vampiric or harmonious, the sexual theory of *yin* and *yang* provided the primary basis for erotic practice and the intellectual/religious interpretation of sexuality during the Division Period (220–581 CE) between the Han and Tang dynasties.³⁷

However, Daoism was not the only voice in discourse on sexuality during this period. Scholars have suggested that Buddhist monks also enjoyed

36 Kecia Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Sherry Sayed Gadelrab, “Discourses on Sex Difference in Medieval Scholarly Islamic Thought,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 66 (2011): 40–81; and Kvam et al. (eds.), *Eve and Adam*.

37 For an overview of the Daoist concept of uniting *yin* and *yang* through intercourse and sexuality in Daoism in post-Han literature, see Catherine Despeux, *Immortelles de la Chine Ancienne: Taoïsme et Alchimie Féminine* (Puisseaux: Pardès, 1990).

popularity as teachers of the art of sex. *Weishu* (The History of the Wei), for example, claims that the famous monk and translator of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, Tanwuchan (384–433), had taught “the art of intercourse between man and woman” to young wives of eminent families. In addition, early Buddhist sutras provided Chinese laymen with a spiritual foundation for defining gender relations and sexual fulfillment. For example, in the *Srgalavadasūtra*, whose translation into Chinese is attributed to An Shigao (mid-second century), the satisfying husband–wife relationship was singled out as one of the ethical cornerstones of a blessed family. The *Srgalavadasūtra* received three other translations in South China during the fourth and fifth centuries. The popularity of this text indicates that Buddhism was considered the source of wisdom for managing household life, and especially for sexual life between husband and wife.

The art of the bedchamber

Rather than competing with the Daoists and Buddhists, Confucianists during that period seemed to happily embrace their guidelines. Such endorsement was probably due to the fact that their interpretation of sexuality answered a real need within Confucian tradition, since patriarchs of Confucian families depended on such advice to manage their inner chambers with multiple concubines. Indeed, the importance of the continuation of the family line propelled Confucians to become strong supporters of such guidance, and this approval certainly contributed to the rise of sexology in pre-Tang China.³⁸

Overall, early texts on the art of the bedchamber, dominated by Daoist theories and practices, reflect a rational rather than romantic perspective on sexuality. Discourses on gender and sexuality underwent an extensive transformation during the Tang Dynasty. Such change was brought by the increased impact of Buddhism as well as the introduction of new elements into the Chinese ruling class thanks to the Tang civil service examination. To be sure, Daoist knowledge of sexology thrived throughout the dynasty; nevertheless, it did not experience the same vigorous development that it had during the Han Dynasty and Division Period. In assessing religious influence on Tang sexual discourses, it was probably the popularity of Buddhism in general and the introduction of Vajrayana Buddhism, also

38 R. H. van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 BC till 1644 AD* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 109.

known as Tantric Buddhism, in particular that added a new dimension to the Tang ideal of body, gender, and sexual intercourse.

While most schools of Mahayana Buddhism advocate refraining from human desires, it was generally understood that sexuality was, nevertheless, central to Buddhist teaching. Discourses on sex were a key component in the Buddhist hermeneutics of desire. Liberation, salvation, or awakening has always to do with sex, whether sexuality is denied, affirmed, or displaced.³⁹ In early Indian Buddhism, continence was an absolute necessity because of the fear that sexuality binds human beings to existence, while in classic yoga disciplines, abstinence was prescribed to discard perturbations of self-mastery and to find an increase of energy through renunciation. In Tantric Buddhism, however, sexuality was used as a source of spiritual energy. Tantric Buddhism drew this association from the cardinal tenet of Mahayana teaching, that is, the identity of passion and awakening at the level of ultimate truth. “But it goes even further when it asserts that the energy of the passions is the necessary catalyst of awakening.”⁴⁰

By emphasizing the identity of passion and awakening, Tantric Buddhism developed the notion of Wisdom as Bliss and asserted the possibility of reaching Buddha-hood in one’s present body. In Tantric texts, Wisdom was commonly paired with Meditation, or with Passion through sexual allegories (for example, male and female sex organs). And the perfect union of the pair can be realized by the union of a male practitioner with a female partner: “the Great Bliss (*mahāsukha*) that ensues coincides with the realization of Emptiness.”⁴¹ One of the most important Tantric texts on the theory of Anuttarayoga, Cakrasamvara Tantra, for example, opens with the following claim: “And now I will explain the secret, concisely, not extensively. Union with Sri Heruka (*Sriherukasam yoga*) is the means of achieving all desired aims.” The sutra discloses that the secret is none other than the act of sex.⁴²

Tantric Buddhism has been regularly translated into Chinese as Mizong, which is also the Chinese translation of Esoteric Buddhism. During the seventh century, although Tantric Buddhism began to be systematized and increasingly came to stress philosophical contemplation in India, its original fervency was not lost; it found its way to China along the Silk Roads and was officially introduced to the Tang court during the eighth century. By the

39 See, Bernard Faure, *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality* (Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 15–47.

40 Faure, *Red Thread*, p. 48. 41 Faure, *Red Thread*, p. 50.

42 See, David B. Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra: The Discourse of Śrī Heruka (Śrīherukābhīdhāna)* (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies, Columbia University, 2007).

ninth century, Tantric Buddhism had penetrated all sectors of Tang society. In emphasizing body as the means of reaching Buddha-hood, Tantric Buddhism thus profoundly affected Tang representations and perceptions of sexuality.

The Tang Dynasty also represented a departure point in the history of the art of the bedchamber with the emergence of a culture of erotica. Writings about sexuality, especially erotic and romantic literature, were much more candid in advocating sexual pleasure, and focused more on sensuality and emotional fulfillment. Such an unprecedented development in Chinese literary history was largely due to the rise of the examination culture and a new elite class of literati. To distinguish themselves from the old power bloc (the seventeen eminent clans), the examination graduates publicly associated with courtesans and wrote about their pursuit of sexual pleasure. It is probably not a coincidence that the first two extant examples of erotica in Chinese history, Bo Xingjian's "Poetic Essay on Great Bliss" and Zhang Zhuo's (660–740) "Merry Making in a Fairy Dwelling," were both produced by examination graduates of the Tang Dynasty. In Chinese and Japanese literature, erotic pleasure is usually represented as entirely good, in accord with the Daoist, Tantric, and Mahayana Buddhist ideas about the positive spiritual qualities unleashed through sexual intercourse, as well as with the cultivation of sensual pleasures advocated in the sexual manuals authored by Tang literati.⁴³

The famous *Kama Sutra* and its reputed author, Mallanaga Vātsyāyana, emerged from a similar milieu: the group of male bureaucrats that came into being as administrators of the Gupta Empire in India (c. 320–550 CE). Here too, the cultivation of erotic expertise was associated especially with the new elite class who had gained social prestige and political power as a result of their literary education and government service. Both the *Kama Sutra* and the Tang erotic manuals presented elaborate and sensuous descriptions of color, sound, scent, image, food, and nature in their depictions of sexual intercourse. They also articulated an understanding of gender that regarded literary knowledge, learned etiquette, aesthetic sensibility, sophisticated taste, and spiritual sensitivity as ideals for both men and women, with the possession of such qualities by both partners considered indispensable in achieving sexual bliss. The *Kama Sutra* even recognizes that such pleasures can be achieved by male–male and female–female sexual pairings

43 Yao, "Historicizing Great Bliss."



Figure 7.2 Roman terracotta lamp, manufactured in Asia Minor during the first century CE. It is decorated with a scene of one woman performing cunnilingus on another woman. © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved

and also identifies a “third sex” of individuals who combine masculine and feminine qualities.⁴⁴

A similar increase in the art and literature of eroticism is evident among the literate classes of Greece and Rome (see Fig. 7.2). The widespread practice and taste for erotic cultivation among the political, mercantile, and cultural elites of these societies was frequently parodied or ironically praised in works of literature that are among the most influential survivals from classical antiquity, including the plays of Menander (341–290 BCE) and Plautus (254–184 BCE), as well as the *Satires* of Horace (65–8 BCE) and Juvenal (*fl.* 100 CE). The two wealthiest, largest, and most diverse cities of the Mediterranean basin, Alexandria under the Ptolemies and Rome as the capital of an expansive empire, were each extremely productive centers of erotic poetry, produced by self-consciously sophisticated and worldly writers like Callimachus (310–240 BCE), Catullus (84–54 BCE), and most famously Ovid (43 BCE – 18 CE) and his *Art of Love*. The production of novels such as Petronius’ *Satyricon* (first century CE) or Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass* (second century CE), as well as the enduring vogue (from the Hellenistic era to the heyday of Rome’s empire and beyond) for a pastoral literature that contrasted the sexual overindulgence of the city with the natural and pure eroticism of shepherds and shepherdesses,

44 Wendy Doniger, “The ‘Kama Sutra’: It Isn’t All About Sex,” *The Kenyon Review* 25 (2003): 18–37.

give further indication of the range and vitality of Greek and Roman discourses focused specifically on how to navigate the enticing, dangerous, degrading, and delightful varieties of sex on offer to the traveler or city-dweller in an urbane and interconnected world.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Whether in discourses devoted to erotic pleasure, bodily health, spiritual progress, marital duty, or the modeling of ideal masculinity and femininity, the development of states, empires, and trans-regional networks represented both a source of danger *and* a source of opportunity. The invention of new forms of bureaucratic organization to address the problems of administering complex and geographically expansive political systems led to the spread of literacy and the increased prestige of the literate. This produced new ideals of male and female accomplishment that both opposed and expanded previous notions of masculine and feminine roles associated with physical prowess. The exposure to multiple cultural practices and belief systems that resulted from the spread of economic and diplomatic networks sometimes promoted reinforcement of pre-existing gender and sexual norms, and sometimes a radical revision or rejection of those norms. In particular, the new quest for personal immortality through sex (or its avoidance) gained widespread appeal, whether in the celibacy associated with Christianity or the harmonizing of *qi* associated with Daoism. Increased urbanization and travel – whether for governmental service, business and trade, religious pilgrimage, or simple tourism – meant increased opportunities to escape (or be driven from) the responsibilities and securities of marriage and familial reproduction. This helped lead to the increased anxiety about securing a stable and happy marriage that one finds in the Greek novels or Ban Zhao's *Admonitions for Women*. It also contributed to the emergence of perspectives that regarded the purpose of sexual intercourse as primarily erotic rather than reproductive. Preserving the well-being and wholeness of the body in this complex, enticing, interconnected world that brought men and women together in a variety of often unprecedented ways became a paramount concern. How this was to be done – whether by embracing epic, romantic, medical, philosophical, bureaucratic, domestic, monastic, and/or erotic models of gender

45 Marilyn B. Skinner, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), and Martha C. Nussbaum and Juha Sihvola (eds.), *The Sleep of Reason: Erotic Experience and Sexual Ethics in Ancient Greece and Rome* (University of Chicago Press, 2002).

relations and sexuality – was a challenge faced by men and women alike in these unprecedentedly cosmopolitan societies.

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Art

ROBERT BAGLEY

Introduction

A chapter that covers two millennia and the art of the world cannot trace a connected history. A chronological narrative would be too general to say much, and no periodization – no subdivision of the time – could be useful cross-culturally. Nor can the chapter limit itself to the art of any one social or political form (state, empire). The material to be discussed comes from imperial courts and Irish monasteries, from Maya city-states and Inner Asian nomad tribes. What the chapter can reasonably attempt is to give some hint of the richness and variety of the world's artistic traditions and to sketch a framework of ideas helpful in understanding them.

To decide what belongs in the chapter, we need a definition of art. By some definitions, the chapter has nothing to cover and no reason to exist. We are sometimes told that art is a Renaissance European invention and that nothing made in earlier periods or outside Europe can properly be called by that name. This opinion need not detain us. Though art made in Europe since the Renaissance has had some distinctive features (but perhaps not so many nor quite so exclusive to post-Renaissance Europe as is sometimes claimed), to make such recent and local developments an essential part of the definition would be ethnocentric and parochial. Design no less than music is a human universal. Picasso did not hesitate to apply the word “art” to the Palaeolithic cave paintings of southern France and northern Spain, and we should not hesitate to follow him. If the cave paintings are to be excluded from the category of art because they had a function, then the paintings in the Sistine Chapel must be excluded too.

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For the purposes of this chapter, art will be defined as artifacts – anything from garments to wall paintings to planned cities – whose functions required that they be designed for visual effect: artifacts designed to attract attention and shape response, to elicit awe or wonder, exaltation or delight. This definition would accommodate most of what is displayed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, an institution that does not confine its attention to the painting and sculpture of post-Renaissance Europe, and it would strike the average museum-goer as uncontroversial. (Ephemeral works such as dances, pageants, and temporary settings for ceremonies are omitted here only because our evidence for them is indirect; in their time they may have been more important to their sponsors than many works that do survive.) In focusing on function and the quest for effects – on the intent to elicit a reaction from an audience – the definition is both more fundamental and less Eurocentric than the discourses of self-expression and communication that we have inherited from the Romantic period. It also accommodates more naturally the role of the patron. In treating the visual arts as first and foremost visual, it does not overlook that the arts are sometimes called on to convey or amplify verbally formulated meanings, but it does insist that visual art is the product of visual thinking, and that words are not the medium of visual thinking any more than they are the medium of musical thinking.

Much is sometimes made of the absence of words for “art” and “artist” in premodern and non-western cultures. We are told that if a culture had no word for the thing, then it cannot have had the thing. By this logic, many societies have not had a religion or an economy either. The argument is sometimes extended to other words, such as “beauty.” If, for example, a society praises artisans not for making things “beautiful” but only for infusing them with “spiritual power,” we are told that the society did not value beauty but only spiritual power. Yet beauty might be what viewers understood as spiritual power, or took as a guarantee of spiritual power. The makers of the Book of Kells certainly made this equation. Its great pages inspire wonder – it is said to have performed miracles – and this response was not obtained by accident. The barely credible labors that created the Kells pages testify that their beauty was deliberately sought, whatever name it was sought under. Had this not been so, the book’s makers would have written out a legible copy of the gospels and called it a day. The labels a culture applies to objects, makers, and effects are of interest as sociological facts about it, but whatever the labels, the reality behind them is that many human products are designed to make an effect on viewers. Everything discussed in this chapter had effects on an audience that were consciously intended and effortfully achieved.

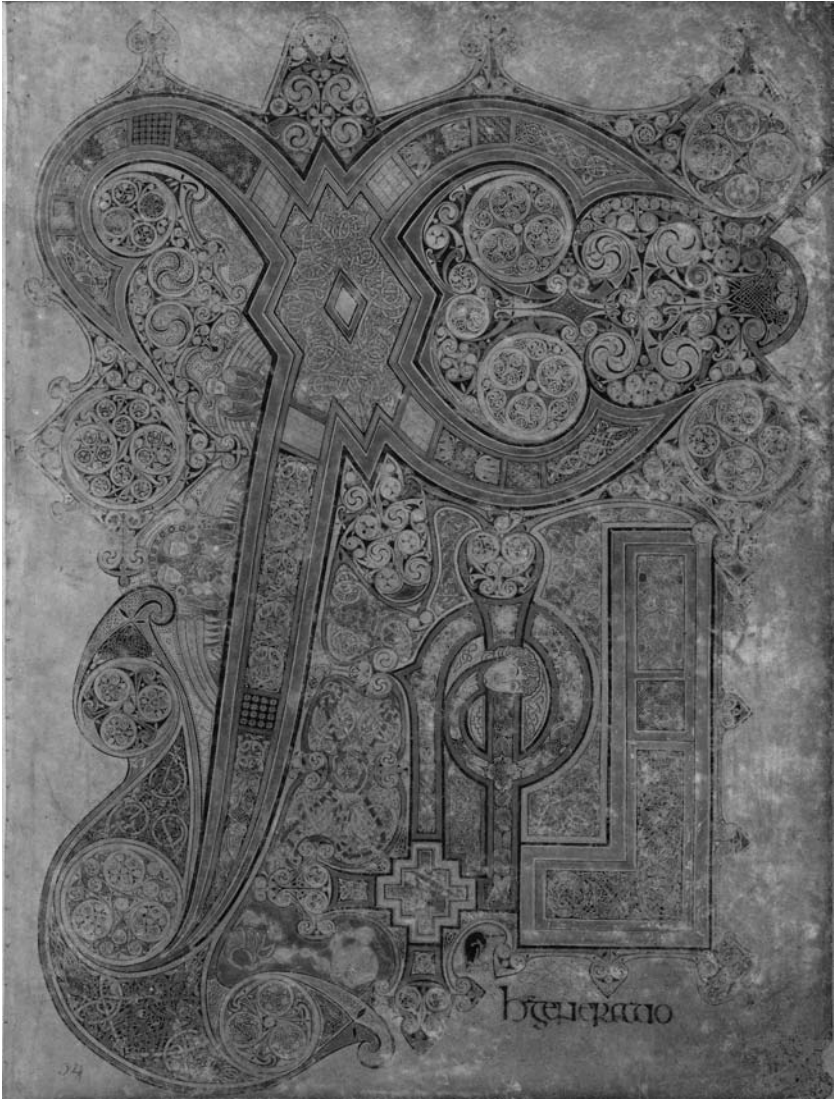


Figure 8.1 Chi-rho page from the Book of Kells. Ink and color on vellum. 33 x 25 cm. Trinity College, Dublin. Eighth or ninth century CE, probably from an Irish monastery on Iona, an island off the coast of Scotland (The Board of Trinity College Dublin)

Figure 8.1 is a page from the Gospel of St. Matthew in which three letters abbreviating the name of Christ – chi, rho, and iota – have been enlarged and decorated to the point of crowding the rest of the text off the page (a small residue can be seen near the bottom right corner). “The talismanic conception of the holy word underlying the development of the grand initials in the Hiberno-Saxon Gospels has here reached its most resounding expression in the huge size of the X and in the shimmering mass of ornament swirling around it like a cloud of incense.” (Nordenfalk)

The word “patron” is a useful shorthand for the sponsor or purchaser of a work and thus the employer of its makers. (It is a label for a role; if a king on occasion invents a design for his artists to execute, he temporarily steps outside his normal role to take the role “artist.”) Art, especially the art made in materials durable enough to have survived from antiquity, is usually costly, and its patrons accordingly come from the part of society that controls great resources: rulers, the state, the church, sometimes a wealthy middle class (e.g. Pompeian villa owners). Patrons shape the development of art by funding what most pleases them or best serves their purposes. Their ability to specify in advance what the artist should make is limited, if only by the impossibility of specifying in words the exact appearance of the thing to be made, but their power to choose among options presented to them – their power to hire and fire – may be absolute. Like natural selection, they are not the source of variation, but they choose the variants that survive to have offspring. We tend nowadays to lament that premodern artists, at the beck and call of their employers, lacked “artistic freedom,” yet our museums are filled with the work of artists who were not obviously hindered by the necessity of pleasing their patrons. Indeed, for all our talk of artistic freedom, it is not obvious that artists today are free from the need to please patrons. Architects certainly are not. The demands of today’s patrons may differ from those of earlier patrons, and they may be exerted less directly (think of “market forces”), but they do not operate less powerfully. The artist is free only when his art does not matter to anybody, and he is then unemployed.

In recent years the idea of art has come under attack as elitist. Some would prefer to abolish the word and to study all objects of human invention together under the leveling rubric “visual culture.” Denying any artifact the cachet of art, treating all artifacts as equal, is claimed to be scientific and objective. But objects have not been equal in the eyes of patrons. Tutankhamun and Hadrian made judgments of quality, and their judgments are facts of history that affected history. Moreover, they are judgments that in

some degree we can understand and share. A sensibility that prefers gold to earthenware, that feels spiritual power in a Buddhist cult image, that envies the beauty of the vizier Ramose or his wife, is not alien to us. When we read an ancient author, Homer or Horace, we do not suppose that all the emotions of the text are inaccessible to us; we put a cautious trust in our own reactions, controlled by whatever knowledge of the original audience is available to us. Our approach to the visual arts of the past should be the same. To us the Chi-rho page from the Book of Kells seems finer than the pages of the average Bible, and we cannot doubt that its earliest viewers saw it the same way. When we judge the reliefs in Ramose's tomb to be exceptionally fine, we can be confident that Ramose and his contemporaries would not have disagreed. We need not shy away from judgments that no one will challenge. The artifacts of Tutankhamun's Egypt were no more equal than its people were.

Some examples

Let us turn from generalities to specific works. The selection that follows, arranged more or less chronologically, has no claim to comprehensiveness; major artistic traditions and large areas of the world are absent. However, the works chosen will raise questions for discussion, supply examples to make discussion concrete, and afford instructive comparisons. Once they have been introduced, we will return to general issues to discuss the settings and functions of art, some of the forms it has taken, materials and techniques, and artists.

[Fig. 8.2] Ramose was vizier of Egypt under Amenhotep III. His rock-cut tomb in the Theban Necropolis was abandoned unfinished, perhaps when the court moved to Amarna in the reign of Amenhotep IV (Akhnaten). The tomb's main pillared hall has reliefs on its entrance wall and back wall (see Fig. 8.2). On the back wall are two images of the king. On the entrance wall Ramose takes part in a ritual banquet along with his wife, parents, and other members of his family, identified by inscriptions above and around them. The figures of his brother and brother's wife illustrated here come from this banquet scene. The brother, a high court official, holds a scepter and wears a gold necklace. His wife, embracing him, wears a circlet with a lotus bud and flower. Both wear wigs whose sharply cut patterns contrast with the sensuous smoothness of their faces. Eyes and eyebrows are the only parts of Ramose's reliefs that were ever painted, but those touches of black are enough to bring the figures to life.

The reliefs are part of the decorative program of a tomb whose function was to sustain the deceased Ramose in an afterlife in which he would enjoy, in



Figure 8.2 The brother of Ramose and his wife. Limestone relief from the tomb of Ramose. Fourteenth century BCE. Egypt, ancient Thebes (modern Luxor) (De Agostini Picture Library / G. Dagli Orti / Bridgeman Images)

perfect youthful beauty, all the comforts of this life: loving family, prosperous estates, royal and divine favor. Had his tomb been finished and used, priests supported by an endowment would have made regular offerings to a statue of him in the tomb chapel, a statue that represented him not because it resembled him but because it was inscribed with his name. Egyptian sculptors were seldom required to capture a likeness. Ramose's artists have not depicted people they ever saw. The faces in the reliefs hardly vary. Ramose's parents look no older than his brother and brother's wife or than he himself. The pursuit of likeness leads away from perfection; emotion likewise distorts the features and does not befit noble bearing. To make an image of an ideal man into a portrait of Ramose, all that was needed was a label. Indeed in any culture, whether the taste of the moment demands close resemblance to the sitter or no resemblance, only a label can make an image into a portrait.

Ramose's reliefs owe their beauty to a team. The walls of Egyptian tombs were decorated by crews of specialists. Once the content and arrangement of texts and scenes had been decided, a master draftsman laid them out in

outline. He was followed by carvers who painstakingly lowered the surface outside the outlines, leaving figures and hieroglyphs in relief, and then shaped the relief parts and added interior details (the zigzags of a wig, the pleats of a dress). Last would come painters who colored everything and added further details that did not exist in the stone: the grain of wood, the feathers of birds, the veins in a stone vase.

[Fig. 8.3] At Abydos, a center of the cult of Osiris, Sety I built a temple with seven main chapels dedicated to seven gods, one of them the deceased Sety. There are also rooms for rituals connected with Osiris, a hall dedicated to Sokar and Nefertem leading to two further chapels, and a gallery on whose wall Sety and his son Ramses II offer incense to an edited list of their predecessors stretching back to the beginning of Egyptian history, the seventy-eight legitimate kings whose rule they inherit.

The relief shown in Figure 8.3 belongs to a series in the hall of Sokar and Nefertem. It was never painted, though it was certainly meant to be (and other reliefs in the temple are). Sety, holding a censer from which smoke rises, pours water over lotuses, while Sokar gives him hieroglyphs for “life” and “power.” The side of Sokar’s throne is textured with hawk plumage and at lower left bears an emblem of the unity of Upper and Lower Egypt. The plinth below is patterned with the hieroglyphs for “all life, power, and stability.” The vulture goddess above the king offers protection and “all life and power.” The writing next to her records speech of Sety and Sokar, who adds martial qualities to his other gifts. The depiction of Sokar is so natural and matter of fact that we scarcely notice that his head is that of a bird. The lucid and stable composition of the relief is a visual analogue of the cosmic order the god bestows.

What is depicted here is a transaction that took place every day in every Egyptian temple. The king, on behalf of humankind, makes offerings to the gods in acknowledgment of the order and stability they have granted. Though in practice the offerings were made not by the king but by priests acting as his deputies, in relief after relief it is only the king who addresses the gods honored in the temple. His role as guarantor of an ordered cosmos is impressed upon the modern visitor with relentless insistence. But who saw the reliefs in Sety’s time? Who besides the priests and the king had access to the rooms that contained them? Royal art often functions as propaganda aimed at the people who pose the greatest threat to the king, those nearest him; it is his relatives and high nobles who must be made to feel the sanctity of his person. However, if those people seldom or never saw the inner parts of Sety’s temple, then the reliefs must have been made for the gods.

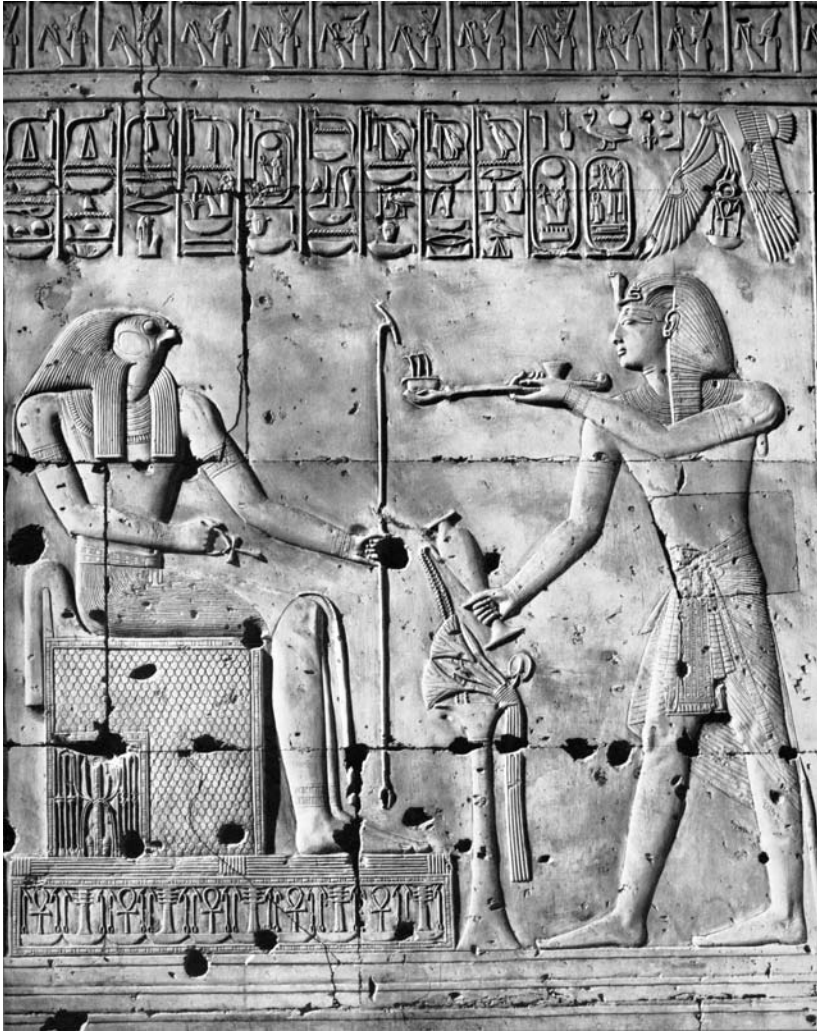


Figure 8.3 Limestone relief from the temple of Sety I (c. 1290–1279 BCE). Abydos, Egypt. (Hirmer Fotoarchiv)

[Fig. 8.4] The bronze ritual vessel, cast complete with lavish decoration and dedicatory inscription, was the principal artifact of elite material culture for the first thousand years of Chinese civilization. Some vessels were deposited in tombs with offerings of food and drink for the deceased; others were used above ground for periodic offerings after the funeral. We know nothing about the offering ceremonies, but they must



Figure 8.4 Chinese bronze ritual vessel. Height 39.5 cm. Early Bronze Age, thirteenth century B.C.E. Said to be from Anyang. Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst Köln C76,2

have been elaborately choreographed, for by the time of the relatively early object shown here, the wealthiest tombs already contained a good twenty distinct vessel types. Like liturgical objects on the altar of a church, the vessels were beautiful instruments that dignified the ritual and made it compelling in the eyes of both audience and actors. All the elite made offerings to their ancestors. Probably for most of them the ceremonies were family affairs, but at the early Bronze Age Anyang site, thirteenth to eleventh century BCE, the king's rituals must have had a larger audience, for his sometimes involved the sacrifice of dozens or hundreds of human victims at the royal cemetery. Rituals that link descendants with ancestors are a claim to legitimate inheritance, a ratification of privilege. The association between bronze ritual vessels and royal legitimacy remained strong enough in later periods for writers to imagine that in ancient times one particular set of tripods had given divine sanction to the rule of the dynasty that possessed it.

The vessel illustrated in Figure 8.4 is a lobed tripod with a circular upper part, two capped posts on the rim, and a strap handle with a curly bracket at the bottom and a feline head at the top. The oldest examples of this vessel type have a pair of tiny stubs on their rims, perhaps remnants of some metalworking process. Whatever their origin, the stubs were soon transformed into massive posts, a purely visual feature, large and dramatic, devoid equally of technical cause and practical function.

The vessel was cast from a clay model into which all its decoration had been carved in sunken line. After casting, the lines were inlaid with a black pigment to make them stand out against the golden color of the metal (now corroded green). The decoration consists of a bilaterally symmetrical pattern unit on each lobe and a band of decoration higher up containing three more pattern units, these centered midway between lobes. (A second band just below the rim is obscured by corrosion.) On the lobes the patterns are staring faces; in the band higher up, paired eyes and horns give vaguer hints of animate presence. Both patterns originated two centuries earlier in a single configuration, a pair of eyes unaccompanied by any other facial feature – a hypnotic glare. The endlessly varied creatures elaborated from this starting point are very different from the imaginary animals of western art, which are almost invariably constructed, like Sokar, as composites of real animals. Imaginary animals continued to be the raw material of ornament throughout the Chinese Bronze Age. Nothing plantlike appeared until about 500 BCE, and plant ornament did not become common until half a millennium after that, when western imaginary plants like those seen on the Hildesheim dish (Fig. 8.9) arrived in company with Buddhist art.

[Fig. 8.5] In the three centuries of their empire, about 900–600 BCE, the Assyrian kings built a series of capitals and palaces in northern Mesopotamia. The palaces were mud brick, but the lower parts of their interior walls were paneled with slabs of fine gypsum carved in relief and painted (the upper parts were only painted). The crews executing the reliefs worked much as their Egyptian counterparts did, with one notable difference. In Egyptian reliefs the hieroglyphs and the figures were parts of a unified design, executed together at every stage, from the first outline drawing to the final painting. The inscriptions in Assyrian reliefs, written in a script with no iconic content, were chiselled in after the reliefs were finished. Sometimes they run continuously across ground and figures, as though oblivious to the images, adding only the king's titulary repeated over and over.

The themes of the reliefs are ritual, war, and the royal hunt. The scenes of war show the army marching, fording rivers, camping, storming cities, fighting battles, pursuing the defeated, and counting the spoils. They seem to be the earliest narrative art anywhere. The scenes in Egyptian tombs, though they go back far earlier, do not tell stories; they are vignettes of life on the Nile and of productive activities on the estate of the deceased. The same vignettes occur in different tombs differently arranged, as though the patron picked his favorites from a pattern book.

The relief illustrated in Figure 8.5 comes from the palace of Assurbanipal at Nineveh, from an extraordinary series showing the king hunting lions. Mesopotamian rulers were depicted hunting lions as early as 3000 BCE, but for drama and for its images of dead and dying animals, Assurbanipal's hunt is unsurpassed. The detail illustrated here barely hints at the impact of the wall of reliefs now in the British Museum. Caged lions have been released into a hunting ground ringed by soldiers and huntsmen with savage dogs. Within the circle the king hunts sometimes on foot, sometimes from his chariot. Here we see him in a large chariot that holds also his driver and two spearmen. The king aims forward, his horses leap over a lion he has already killed, and his spearmen stop a lion that lunges at him from the rear. The composition of four active overlapping figures is complex, but its design is so lucid that it does not seem so. The calm geometry created by the chariot box, the spokes of the wheel, and the diagonal of the spears and lion conveys the king's self-assurance in a scene of devastation. The modern viewer of these reliefs probably feels most strongly the poignant suffering of the slaughtered animals, and the carvers too must have felt it – and studied it – to convey it so compellingly. But for the Assyrian viewer living in a dangerous world, the demonstration of

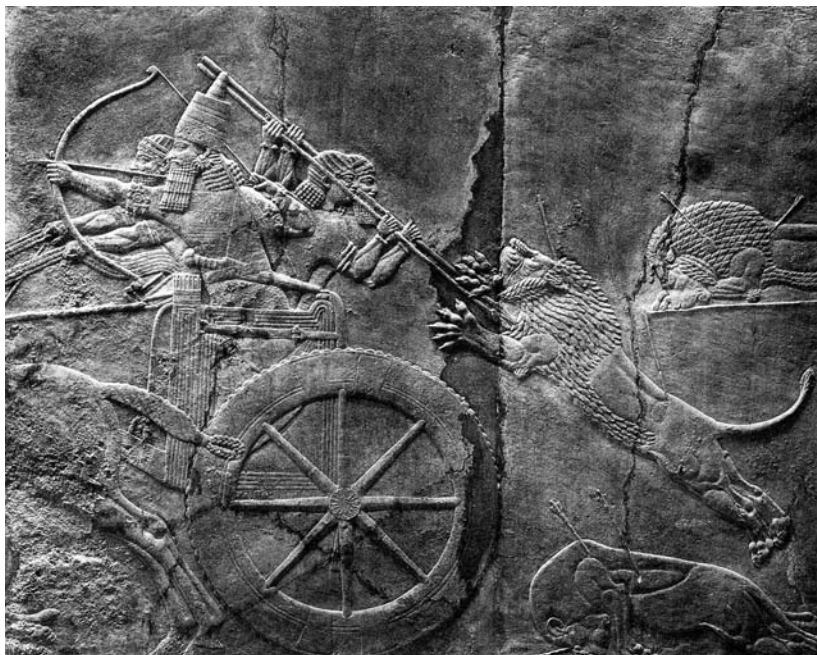


Figure 8.5 Lion hunt. Detail of gypsum orthostat. Palace of Assurbanipal (r. 669–631 B.C.E.) at Nineveh. London, British Museum (© The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved)

his king's vigor must have been welcome, and to visiting ambassadors it was a threat.

[Fig. 8.6] The Persian Empire familiar from Herodotus was ruled by the Achaemenid dynasty, three of whose kings bore the name Darius; the first Darius built Persepolis. The inscription of the bowl in Figure 8.6 uses the cuneiform script to write “Darius, the Great King” three times in the three official languages of the empire, Old Persian, Elamite, and Neo-Babylonian. The king may have used the bowl at table, or he may only have stored it in his treasury along with the other precious metalwork that we see brought to him in tribute on the staircase walls at Persepolis.

The bowl was shaped from a flat disk of gold by hammering, that is, by a process of gradual deformation. Because iron must be hammered hot, the blacksmith needs tongs, but the smith working other metals hammers them cold and can thus hold the object with his hand, giving him good control. He uses hammers of a soft material, bone or stone, so as to stretch the metal without tearing it. In the ancient world, whether in gold, silver, or bronze,



Figure 8.6 Gold bowl. Inscribed “Darius, the Great King.” Height 11.1 cm. Persian, Achaemenid, fifth century BCE. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 54.3.1 (© The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY)

simple shapes were routinely made by hammering to conserve metal. Metal could be hammered much thinner than it could be cast, and the cost of metal meant that in most places (China is the exception) casting was the technique of last resort, used only for shapes that could not be made by hammering. This economic logic applied even to bronze, though with more force to more expensive metals. The smith was normally under such pressure to conserve metal that he was sometimes obliged to make an object in several parts by several techniques. If his patron demanded a replica in gold of a stone bowl carved with projecting animal heads, he might be forced to cast the heads and rivet them onto a hammered bowl (compare Athena on the Hildesheim dish, Fig. 8.9). Here, however, he was left to his own devices, and the result is a softly swelling shape in which it is the material that speaks.

[Fig. 8.7] The motif of animal combat, typically a predator killing a herbivore, originated in Mesopotamia in the fourth millennium BCE. It figures spectacularly on the staircases of Darius’ fifth-century palace at Persepolis. But it is associated above all with the portable art – ornaments, clothing, even tattoos – of the Inner Asian nomads of the first millennium BCE, who made it



Figure 8.7 Bronze plaque from the Kingdom of Dian. Height 8 cm, length 16 cm. Second-first century BCE. Shizhaishan, Yunnan, southwest China

their own and carried it across the steppes as far as China and Siberia. On the nomads' favorite ornaments, flat plaques of gold or bronze, the depiction of combat tends to be less naturalistic than patterned and formulaic. In some examples the victim's hindquarters are rotated 180 degrees so that its hind legs are in the air, a posture we take to express its agony until we notice that the predator's hindquarters are rotated too.

The animal combat illustrated in Figure 8.7 is not from the steppes, however, and though steppe versions inspired it, it could scarcely be more different. It is cast bronze, an ornament for a buckle, from a kingdom of farmers and cattle herders located in what is now southwest China. In Chinese sources of the second century BCE, the kingdom is called Dian. Rich graves at Dian cemeteries of the last few centuries BCE have yielded a wealth of bronze artifacts, including lively three-dimensional figural scenes depicting every aspect of daily life. Animal-combat plaques likewise occur in great variety, and with a violence unmatched in the whole history of the motif. In the example illustrated here, a boar is attacked by two leopards and a snake. The leopards are howling and the boar is terrified.

[Fig. 8.8] The tomb of the King of Nan Yue, a ruler of south China who died about 122 BCE, was discovered in Canton in 1983. About 200 jades were found on or near the king's body. Some were antiques he had collected. Most, from pendants to sword fittings, were jewelry.

Jade, meaning nephrite and other hardstones with similar qualities, was prized in what is now northeastern China as early as the fourth millennium BCE.



Figure 8.8 Jade ornament belonging to the King of Nan Yue. Diameter 10.6 cm. Second century BCE. Guangzhou (Canton), China

Because of its hardness it had to be worked (sawn, drilled, ground to shape) entirely with abrasives. The first step in manufacture was to saw a pebble of raw material into slabs; hence jades tend to be flat. The next step was for a specialist to draw a design on the slab, avoiding flaws and exploiting any attractive patterning. Workers then cut the design out by sawing and drilling, and subsequently finished the surface by grinding and polishing. This procedure gave birth to an art form that put its emphasis on surface and silhouette. It stimulated the imagination of the designer drawing on the slab by challenging him to adapt a familiar shape or subject to a specific piece of precious material. Shapes and subjects had many sources. Disks and axe blades were popular shapes with prehistoric origins; dragons were a favorite subject because their forms could be freely varied. What mattered above all was

the coloring and luster of the material and the inventiveness and finesse with which it was worked. The value set on the material is attested by the frequent reworking of broken jades and the occasional making of gold settings for unsalvageable fragments.

Perhaps the finest of the Nan Yue king's jades is the disk illustrated in Figure 8.8, which was found on a veil covering his face. Two creatures are fitted into the spaces defined by two concentric rings. A dragon compressed into the inner ring is exploding out of it. The dragon faces to the right, its fanged jaws gaping wide over its neck, and its fore and hind legs thrust through the inner ring to brace against the outer one. A bird standing on the dragon's foreleg turns backward to squawk at it. The space between the two rings is mostly filled by a billowing crest that rises from the bird's head and an even longer tail plume, but the twisting tail of the dragon also contributes a curl or two. In this elegant and witty confrontation of two irate animals, we see the Chinese artist's transformation of the northern nomads' animal-combat motif.

[Fig. 8.9] This dish in comes from a find made in 1868 near Hannover, the largest hoard of Roman silver yet unearthed outside the frontiers of the empire, perhaps an imperial gift to a formidable barbarian. The collecting of silver plate became part of patrician life after the second Carthaginian war (218–201 BCE) gave Rome access to the silver mines of Spain, brought booty from cities like Syracuse and Tarentum, and inspired Roman philhellenism. Vast sums were paid for antiques; a vast demand for new pieces was supplied by Greek smiths. In imperial times a middle-class family might own both a set of table silver for dining and a collection of showpieces (heirlooms, wedding gifts) like the Hildesheim dish for display on side tables. A painting in a Pompeiian tomb depicts such a display.

The dish consists of a central medallion and a border of plant ornament. The medallion, which bears a seated figure of Athena, was apparently cast; the dish to which it is attached was hammered. (Two handles not shown in the illustration were also made separately and attached.) The ornament, palmettes and other frondlike motifs joined by arcs that suggest a stem, is of a kind ubiquitous in Greek and Roman art. The background to the plants has been gilded, as have Athena's gown and the rock she sits on. She holds a shield in one hand and a plow in the other, and a tiny owl perches on the rock in front of her.

The center of attention is Athena and above all her gown. Drapery in classical art had at least three functions. Depicting cloth convincingly was the least of them. More important were to reveal the articulation of the



Figure 8.9 Roman silver dish from Hildesheim, Germany. Partly gilded. Diameter 25 cm. Made in or shortly after the reign of Augustus (27 BCE – 14 CE). Staatliche Museen, Berlin (bpk, Berlin / Art Resource, NY)

body beneath and to create pleasing patterns of light and shadow. When ideas from classical statuary were adopted into other artistic traditions (Buddhist Asia; Netherlandish painting), the relative weights given to these functions might change dramatically.

[Fig. 8.10] This figure shows a room in the house of a well-to-do Pompeian family. Architectural features divide the walls horizontally into a dado, a middle zone, and an upper zone, and vertically into two broad niches for paintings and, flanking the niches, windows through which we glimpse airy structures that look like stage sets. The dado consists of rectangles of red marble alternating with yellow squares. A white ledge separates it from the middle zone. Slender white columns in the middle zone stand directly above the yellow squares. The columns, paired with pilasters in the wall behind them,



Figure 8.10 Pentheus Room, House of the Vettii, Pompeii. First century CE, between the earthquake of 62 CE and the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE. (Scala / Art Resource, NY)

carry the roofs of shallow porches (*aediculae*) that shelter the two niches. Within the niches are large panel paintings hung on a yellow wall (yellow, which also surrounds the windows and fills the upper zone, is the dominant color in the room). The room is a picture gallery (*pinacotheca*), and the pictures are probably copies of famous Greek originals: on the left wall, the infant Hercules strangling serpents, on the right, Pentheus assailed by the Bacchae.

The room has been described above as though the features mentioned were real, but they are only paint on flat walls of plaster. The room has no windows, no *aediculae*, no marble, no panel paintings. What it has in abundance is illusion and fantasy. The interior decorators who created it had mastered all the tricks of perspective, foreshortening, and light and shadow, and they painted with the room's actual sources of light and likely angles of view in mind. For the "old master paintings," they no doubt consulted their patrons, who chose from their pattern books. The Hellenistic ancestors of Roman wall painting imitated palaces that had real marble, real niches, and real paintings or even statuary in the niches. But the cheap imitation of

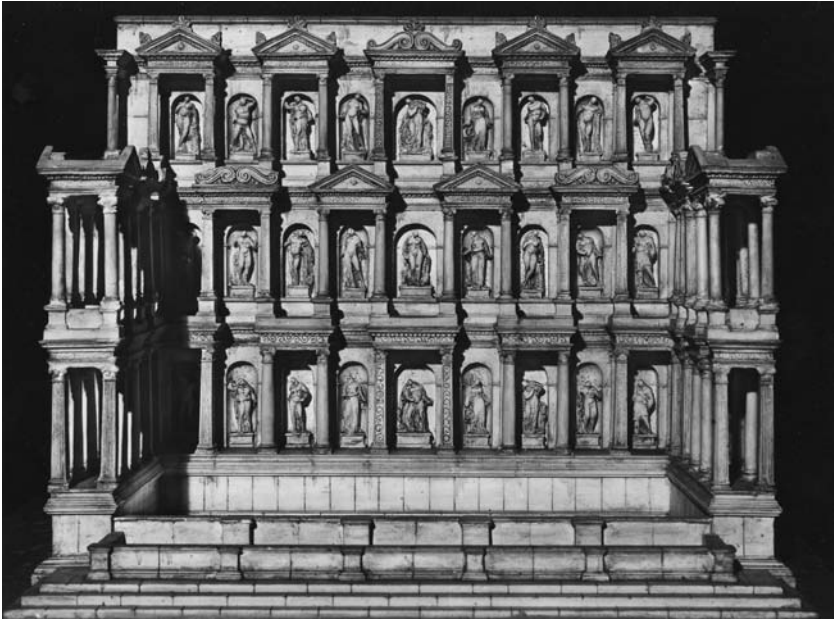


Figure 8.11 Nymphaeum (model), Miletus, Asia Minor. Built to honor the father of Trajan. Second century C.E. Rome, Museo della Civiltà Romana (Alinari / Art Resource, NY)

expensive interiors quickly turned into an arena for virtuosity. The House of the Vettii is contemporary with Nero's Golden House in Rome, where painters much more skilled than those available to the middle class of a provincial town took the same delight in creating layer upon layer of illusion.

[Fig. 8.11] A nymphaeum is a setting for a fountain, a backdrop, one of several Roman building types (theater stages were another) that were all surface. In Figure 8.11 a blank wall has been made three-dimensional and filled with energy by encrusting it with deep porchlike aediculae staggered so that a porch in one storey aligns with the space between porches in adjacent storeys. Both the porches and the spaces between them contain statue-filled niches.

The reason for illustrating a model here rather than an actual building is that the model restores the original complement of statues, without which the building is an incomprehensible riot of columns, entablatures, and pediments. The statues give the niches a reason to exist; the niches also give the statues a reason to exist. Both are components of a system for enlivening surfaces. The statues thus represent one end, the anonymous



Figure 8.12 Arch of Constantine. 315 C.E. Rome. Height 21 m, width 25.9 m, depth 7.4 m (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut)

end, of the gamut of functions served by statuary in the classical world. The barbarians in the attic storey of the Arch of Constantine are close to this end (Fig. 8.12). At the other end – an isolated image of a god or emperor or hero – the statue is the uncontested focus of attention, and its identity counts for everything.

The decorative idea seen in Figure 8.11 at its most basic has been immensely important both in and beyond architecture. Instead of treating a large surface as the field for a large picture, it breaks the surface up into an ordered set of bounded units and turns the boundaries into frames by giving them something to frame. On the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (359 C.E.), for example, an aedicular framework divides the surface into compartments for figural groups depicting Christian subjects. Once alerted to the device, we will see it everywhere, from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel to the exteriors of Cambodian temples (where the frames are large expanses of luxuriant plant ornament). Many buildings that once were statue-filled are today untenanted because they have been mined over the centuries by collectors seeking sculpture (though the loss of the finest classical statues has occurred

mainly because they were metal and have been melted down). The statues we encounter as freestanding works in museums are more often than not fragments extracted from ensembles. The extraction always impoverishes. Sometimes it also puts a spotlight on objects that were meant only to be seen, not looked at.

[Fig. 8.12] The triumphal arch is a monument type that has never lost its appeal for men envious of the power of Rome. The earliest examples in stone, from the second century BCE, were enlarged and permanent versions of the temporary structures traditionally erected for the triumphs of victorious generals. In form the monument is a sort of apotheosis of Roman engineering, a freestanding display version of the arches that in series create aqueducts and bridges. Most surviving examples have only one arched opening instead of Constantine's three. On top was normally a sculpture group in gilded bronze, including a horse-drawn chariot bearing the victor. The sides displayed sculptures, reliefs, and in the attic storey, an inscription in cut or bronze letters, all related to the events commemorated. In imperial times triumphal arches were built all over the empire. More than fifty are recorded in Rome alone.

Constantine's arch, one of the largest, spans the processional route taken by emperors when they entered the city in triumph. Commemorating his victory over his rival Maxentius in 312, it was dedicated to him by the Senate and People of Rome in 315. It is a massive block of masonry pierced by a large central arch and two side arches. In the spandrels of the arches are winged victories. Above each side arch is a horizontal frieze and a pair of roundels. The piers of the arches are fronted by Corinthian columns on high pedestals bearing relief panels. The columns carry an entablature, above which the attic storey displays the Senate's dedicatory inscription, large panels sculpted in relief, and, over the columns, freestanding statues of barbarians (like victories, always appropriate to the celebration of a triumph). Using the post-and-lintel architecture of the Greek temple (columns, entablature) not for any structural purpose but to organize the surfaces of an otherwise inarticulate mass, the Arch of Constantine is a deeply satisfying architectural composition, one that has been an inspiration to classically minded architects ever since the Renaissance. It provides ready-made, for example, a design for the west front of a church.

As early as the Renaissance it was recognized – by the painter Raphael, in his capacity as supervisor of antiquities for the pope – that the reliefs on the arch differ in style and were not all made in the fourth century. The roundels were taken from monuments of Hadrian (r. 117–138), with Hadrian's face

recarved to resemble Constantine's. Other parts come from monuments of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. Nor, it seems, were these spolia fitted into a new arch. Recent investigation of the core suggests that the lower part of the arch is a drastically remodeled arch of Hadrian.

The discrepancy between the lounging classical figures in the Hadrianic roundels and the regimented figures of the Constantinian friezes below them has excited much comment. The Renaissance made the classical style of Greece and Rome into an artistic norm, the only correct style, and the inexplicable abandonment of correctness in the Constantinian friezes came to be seen as the death of art and the onset of the Middle Ages. Since about 1900, scholars friendlier to medieval art have tried to view the Constantinian friezes not as a failure to maintain classical standards or as the artistic manifestation of a dying civilization but as a deliberate choice made in the service of new purposes. But though the question is no longer formulated as "Why did art die?" the conviction of an earlier generation of scholars that the change of style should hold some deep meaning lingers.

[Fig. 8.1] The Book of Kells is a manuscript of the four Gospels made in the eighth or ninth century, probably in the scriptorium of an Irish monastery on Iona, an island off the Scottish coast. Monasticism first took root in the British Isles in sixth-century Ireland. The script now called Insular majuscule (a tiny bit appears at bottom right on the page illustrated in Fig. 8.1) was developed by Irish monks copying books brought from the Continent, but it was soon adopted by the English as well. Heirs to Celtic and Germanic artistic traditions, Insular scribes preferred ornament that lies flat on the page to illusionistic pictures that evoke depth and volume. They accordingly found it natural to fuse the illumination of a page with the writing, thereby transforming their continental models in ways that with the help of missionaries were soon to be influential on the Continent. The decorated initials of Romanesque and Gothic manuscripts originated in the British Isles.

Kells is the latest and most lavishly decorated of surviving Insular Gospel books. Its great decorated pages, like those in earlier books (the Book of Durrow, the Lindisfarne Gospels), are the creations of artists who had no habits inherited from the papyrus rolls of the ancient world. For the Insular scribe, a book was a codex; when he decorated a book, his invention was focused on an upright rectangle. Typically, each of the four Gospels opens with a page portraying its author (the evangelist), a page filled by a decorated cross, and a page that begins the text with a spectacular initial. Other pages might also be singled out for special treatment. The Chi-rho page seen in Figure 8.1 is a passage in the Gospel of St. Matthew that begins the genealogy of Christ.

An Insular innovation still found in book design today is the practice of opening a chapter with a large letter followed by smaller ones that merge into the body of the text with a diminuendo effect. The Kells Chi-rho is the supreme exemplar. The word "Christi" is abbreviated to three letters, the first of which, *chi*, stretches like a starfish down the page; the next two, *rho* and *iota*, are entwined, forming a vertical support for one arm of the *chi*. After these the text continues briefly at bottom right, below a reverse-L-shaped bracket, in normal script ("autem generatio," "autem" abbreviated to one letter). A cloud of decoration, mainly red, yellow, black, blue, and purple, envelops the big letters in a mixture of animal interlace, geometric ornament (simple frets; circles and volutes whose swinging movement was created by complex compasswork), and charming figural motifs (cats and mice near the bottom, between the *chi* and the *rho*; below the *iota*, an otter with a fish). Other pages of the Kells book have more text and less decoration but fuse the two no less astonishingly, sometimes in initials, sometimes in tiny ornaments full of whimsy that burst from the text without apparent provocation, as though the scribe carefully forming elegant letters now and again suffered an ornamental seizure. Sudden but seamless shifts between word and ornament suggest that writer and decorator were the same person, though more than one writer-decorator may have worked on the book. Insular scribes turned the decorated book into a magical object, the chief adornment of the altar during the divine service. Their labor was itself an act of devotion, "another way to attain communion with God" (Nordenfalk).

[Fig. 8.13] Inspired by the Prophet's house at Medina, the first Muslim places of public worship took the form of an enclosed courtyard with a covered prayer hall on the side toward Mecca. The earliest great mosque that survives in something close to its original form is the one in Damascus (see Fig. 8.13a), capital of the Umayyads (661–750). Founded by the caliph al-Walid, it was built on a site previously occupied by a temple of Jupiter and then by a Christian church. To make architecture into propaganda for the new faith, the Umayyads required new building types that not only met religious needs but also were splendid enough to compete with Christian churches. They had the means to hand in the revenues of their newly conquered empire and in its Hellenistic and Byzantine architectural traditions.

Al-Walid's Damascus mosque is a courtyard enclosed on three sides by covered arcades and on the fourth, the south side, by a prayer hall. Minarets at two corners of the prayer hall announced the arrival of Islam on the city's

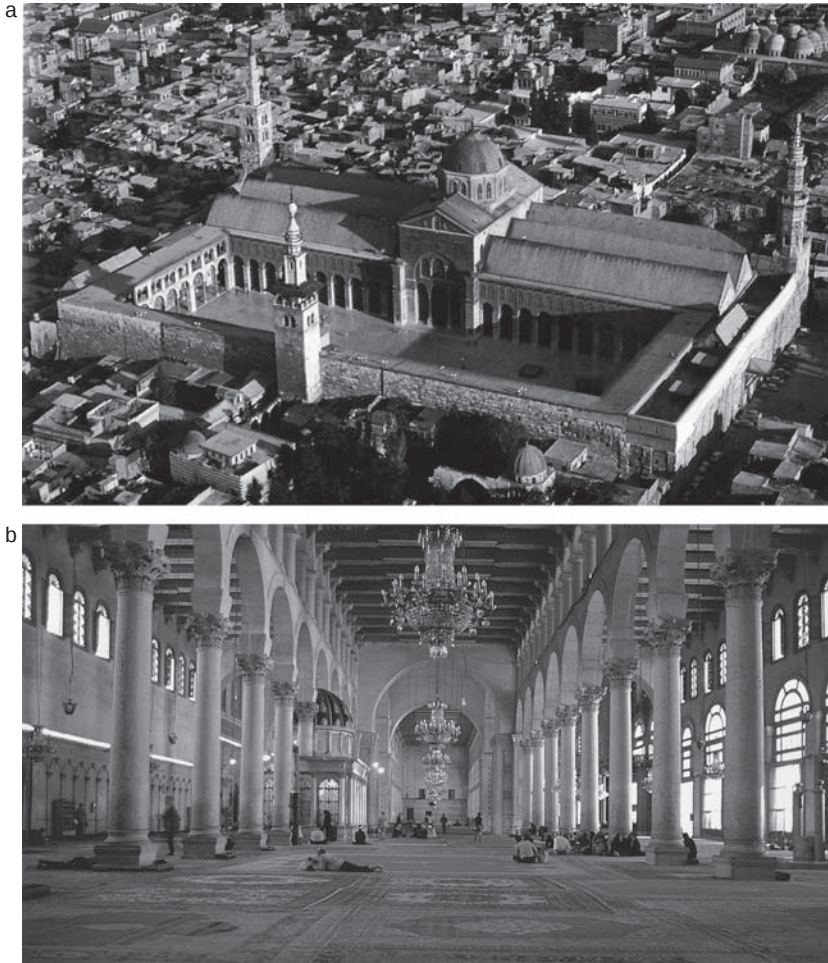


Figure 8.13 Great Mosque, Damascus. 706–715 CE. (Hermann)

skyline. The hall consists of a domed central block, its gabled courtyard face resembling the front of a Christian church, and low flanking wings with triple roofs. The interior view reproduced in Figure 8.13, in which we see nothing of the central block but two big arches, might at first glance suggest that we are in a basilica, that is, a hall divided by arcades into a central space and two aisles. If this were a Christian church, we would be looking from the high altar at the east end toward the main entrance in the west front. But the Muslim users of this space turn at right angles to the

photographer's orientation. The wall on the left is the qibla wall, the one the congregation faces to pray; the windowed wall on the right affords entrance from the courtyard. The domed central block, reserved for the caliph, was probably modeled on the throne room of a Roman palace, but instead of a throne in the back wall it has a mihrab, a niche indicating the direction of Mecca (there are two more in the public part of the mosque). The building may thus have originated as a creative recombination of pre-Islamic church and palace types. But if certain of its features had secular sources, those that were retained by later mosques, such as the mihrab with a dome in front of it to signal its importance, quickly lost their secular associations.

The monolithic Corinthian columns of the prayer hall are spolia from older buildings. Other materials as well as craftsmen were imported from Egypt. Of the original decoration only a little survives. Openwork grilles carved from marble derive from the same Roman interlace that inspired Insular manuscript illuminators. Marble paneling of dadoes follows Byzantine precedent, and the wall mosaics, dominated by green and gold, have Byzantine sources too. The walls of the arcades around the courtyard are covered with mosaics of the utmost splendor. In subject they recall Roman wall paintings, with great trees, verdant landscapes, and fantasy architecture, but human and animal figures are absent, country and town unpopulated. Perhaps this is the landscape of paradise, awaiting the faithful.

[Fig. 8.14] Like the silver dish from Hildesheim, this bowl was probably intended for display in a prosperous home. Its aesthetic of elegance and restraint may owe something to religious objections to precious metals and figural motifs. Deeper than it appears in the illustration – the sides slope at about forty-five degrees – it is an Iranian response to white porcelains imported from China. Unable to reproduce the hard white body and high-fired glaze of Chinese wares, potters in Abbasid Iran put an opaque white slip on an earthenware body and decorated it with an inscription written by an expert calligrapher in a dark-brown slip. The letters have been shaped to consist almost entirely of horizontal strokes running around the circumference and descenders aimed at the center.

In Islamic art, writing occurs on all surfaces, from bowls to buildings, in a multiplicity of script variants, sometimes boldly legible, sometimes impenetrably patterned. Iranian bowls like this one are among its earliest occurrences as principal motif. Their inscriptions are proverbs and expressions of good wishes, in cryptic language, sometimes sacrificing orthography to composition. The Kufic script in which they are written – angular, clear, formal, and monumental – was the script of the first Quranic manuscripts.

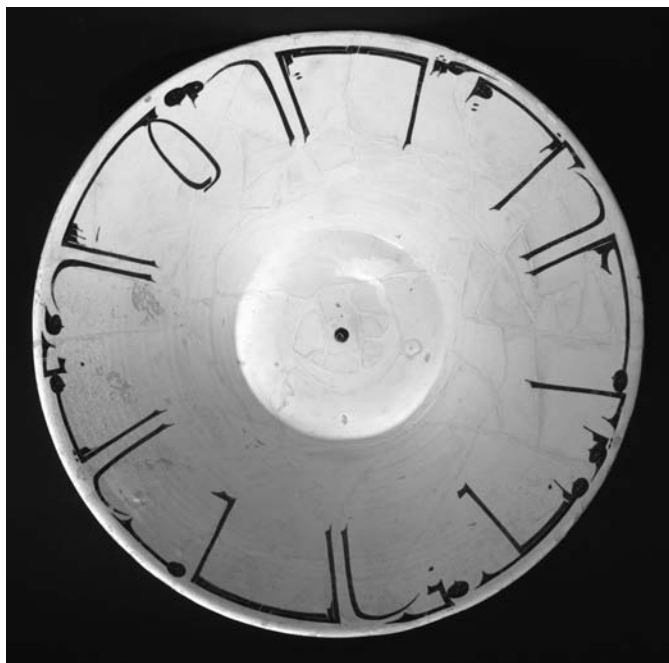


Figure 8.14 Slipped earthenware bowl. Inscribed in Arabic “Planning before work protects you from regret. Prosperity and peace.” Diameter 45.7 cm, height 17.8 cm. Ninth or tenth century C.E. Nishapur, Iran. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 65.106.2 (© The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Written with a simple reed pen, Islamic calligraphy has a line quality closer to that of Latin scripts like the Insular majuscule of the Book of Kells than to the always varying line width encouraged by the soft Chinese brush.

[Fig. 8.15] Dedicated to Amaterasu, the goddess from whom the Japanese imperial family descends, the Inner Shrine (see Fig. 8.15) is the most important of a large complex of Shinto shrines in a forested setting of great natural beauty at Ise. Shinto is the name given after the arrival of Buddhism to the religion that prevailed before its arrival, an animism that sees divinity in nature and builds a shrine at any natural site whose marvelous character might attract a god to dwell there. The Inner Shrine at Ise is a group of three wooden halls surrounded by four wooden palisades. Amaterasu, represented by a bronze mirror, resides in the main hall. Building a house for her fixed a location where the emperor could communicate with her, and the high priest or

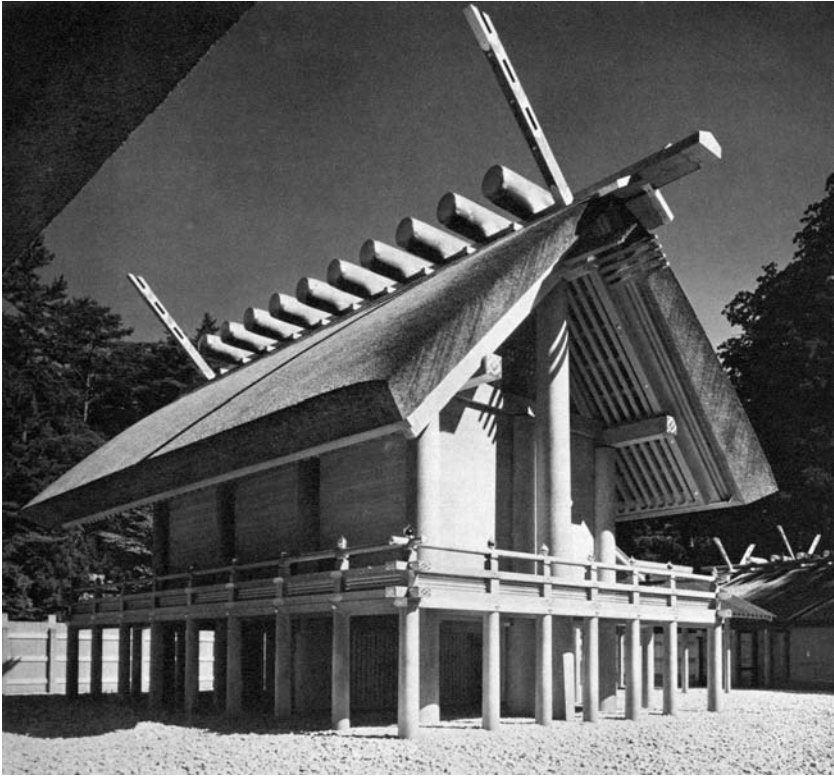


Figure 8.15 Main Hall of the Inner Shrine at Ise, Japan. Rebuilt at intervals since 685 C.E. First built perhaps two or three centuries before that (George Braziller, Inc.)

priestess in charge of the shrine has always been a member of the imperial family. Since the seventh century it has been the custom to rebuild the shrine every twenty years in a ritual act of renewal. The practice has been interrupted in troubled times, but the rebuilding that took place in 2013 was the sixty-second. The shrine preserves, with a faithfulness that can be assessed from depictions of similar structures on bronze mirrors, a building form that antedates the arrival of Buddhist architecture from the Continent.

The main hall is a thatched house encircled by a verandah and raised on piles. Access is by a stair that leads up to a door in one of the long sides. The building's appearance is dominated by an immense roof with sheltering eaves. The roof ridge is supported by a large pillar at either end. Forked finials are extensions of the bargeboards. Logs laid across the ridge are, like certain features of Greek temples, traditionally explained as transformations of

some once functional component. Apart from a few metal fittings and the reeds used for thatch, all parts of the building are cypress. Horizontal beams and planks are squared, vertical posts are round. Surfaces are planed smooth and left unpainted. Workmanship is of the utmost refinement, most obviously in the trimming of the thatch.

Today the building is inevitably seen as one of the supreme manifestations of a potent strain in Japanese aesthetics, a hyper-refined rusticity combined with an extreme sensitivity to unprocessed (“natural”) materials. At the time when it was first built, however, more splendid buildings and less natural materials were unknown, and its original viewers are unlikely to have seen anything rustic about it. No change of form in the course of sixty-two rebuildings can have been so great as the change in the mental comparisons that determine the reactions of viewers.

[Fig. 8.16] This image was made in northeast India at Sarnath, then a great monastic center, in the fifth century. It probably stood in a place open to public worship, either outdoors against the base of a stupa or indoors against the rear wall of a small shrine. It is not inscribed, but other Sarnath images have dated inscriptions naming their donors, sometimes monks.

After achieving enlightenment, Shakyamuni, the former Prince Siddhartha, now the Buddha, announced his path of escape from the weary cycle of rebirth by preaching a sermon in the Deer Park at Sarnath. The base of this image depicts the sermon. Six kneeling auditors flank a wheel that symbolizes the doctrine, and below them two partly obliterated deer identify the place. However, the preaching Buddha who should be at the center of the scene is missing. The main character in the story has been lifted out, enlarged, and converted into a cult image, a focus for meditation and worship, and the narrative scene has become a footnote.

The image is a symbol composed of symbols. The Buddha’s monastic robe, on which traces of red paint survive, signifies renunciation of the world, as do curls remaining from princely hair now cut short and earlobes distended by ornaments the prince no longer wears. The cranial bump signifies transcendental wisdom, the crossed legs are in the posture of meditation, and the hands form the mudra of Setting the Wheel of the Law in Motion, which alludes specifically to the Sermon in the Deer Park. The Buddha sits on a throne whose back panel is ornamented with fantastic animals. The disk behind his head, signifying the light that radiates from his body, bears a densely packed vine scroll and two celestial beings who strew flowers. A pearl-bordered blank circle at its center concentrates our attention on his face. It is not the face of a speaker engaged with an audience. The sculptor’s

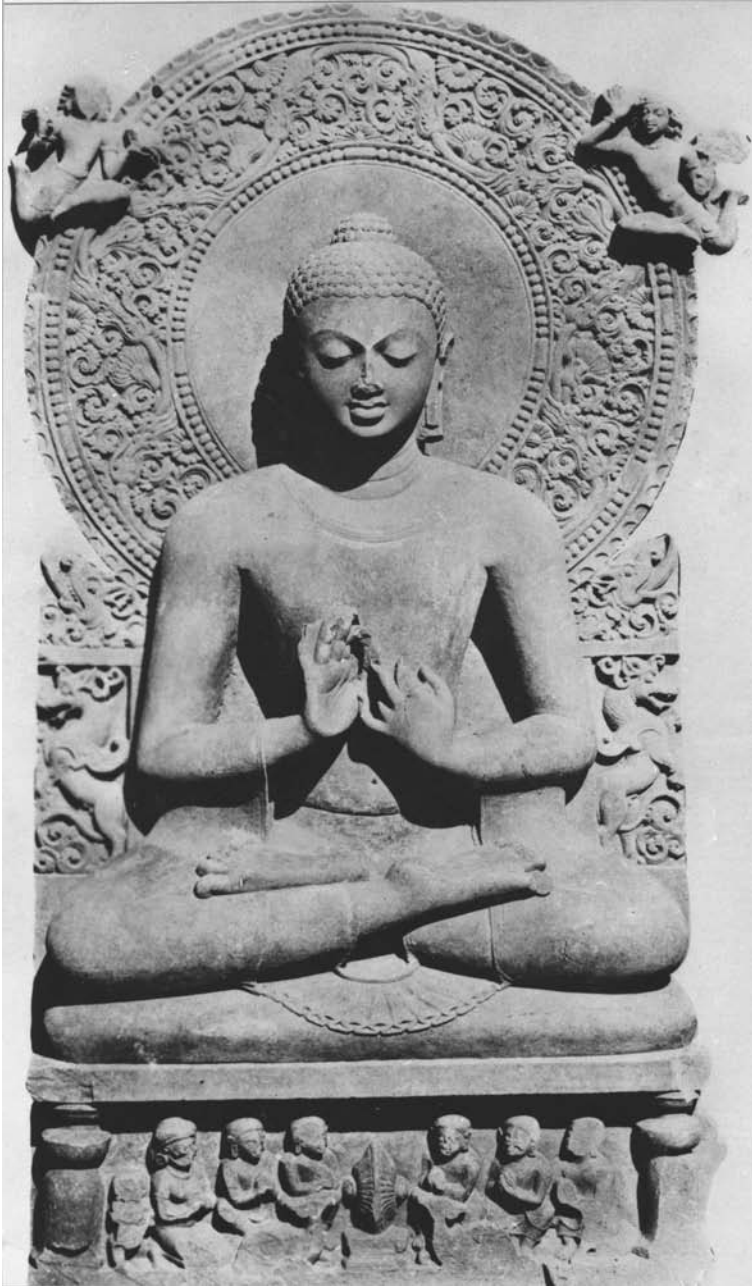


Figure 8.16 Teaching Buddha. Sandstone, originally painted. Height 158 cm. Gupta period, late fifth century C.E. Sarnath, India. Archaeological Museum, Sarnath (Josephine Powell Photograph, courtesy of Special Collections, Fine Arts Library, Harvard University)

task was to render the sacred in human form, to render approachable and appealing a being who has passed into nirvana (extinction; bliss without consciousness of self). The means he found include the body's sensuous surfaces, set off by the ornate richness of throne and halo; its stable geometry, an equilateral triangle with the mudra at its center; and above all the perfection of the face (fuller and rounder than it appears in the illustration), the serene inwardness of its smile and downcast eyes.

In the first centuries CE, as Buddhist art was taking shape, it encountered classical art in Gandhara, the eastern limit of Alexander's conquests. Two features of this image, the plant ornament on the disk and the pleats of the monastic robe, have classical sources; on the Hildesheim dish (Fig. 8.9), Athena too wears a cloth garment and is framed by a pearl-edged ring of imaginary plants. But the Indian sculptor cared more for the plants, on which he lavished his invention, than for the cloth, which he could not allow to obscure the Buddha's perfect bodily form. A small semicircle of pleats spills onto the front of the throne, but drapery contributes nothing essential. It was the body that had to speak.

[Fig. 8.17] Buddhism arrived in Japan from China by way of Korea in the sixth century CE. Horyuji, the Temple of the Flourishing Law, was founded at the Japanese capital in 607, and this bronze trinity was cast for the altar of its image hall in 623. The caster, named Tori, was the grandson of a Chinese sculptor who had immigrated to Japan a century earlier, in 522, and his images are faithful to the Chinese style of his grandfather's time.

The central figure of the trinity, shown seated wearing a monastic robe, is Shakyamuni. Though he is presented here as an accessible deity whose gaze and gestures are addressed to the worshipper, early Buddhists would have said that after renouncing household life, achieving enlightenment, preaching his doctrine, and entering nirvana, the Buddha was no longer active in the world. The figures flanking him wear crowns and princely garments because, though comparable in spiritual attainment, they have vowed not to enter nirvana until all sentient beings have been saved. They are Bodhisattvas, the active, compassionate deities of Buddhism, the product of doctrinal developments that widened the religion's appeal beyond the arduous path of individual striving prescribed by the founder. The trinity of a Buddha and two Bodhisattvas, a configuration whose symmetry belongs not to narrative but to a transcendental realm, is both the archetype and the core of most larger groupings of Buddhist figures (Seckel).

Indian images were the hallowed prototypes for the Buddhist images of the Far East. Behind the head of Tori's Shakyamuni, the circle with its pearls



Figure 8.17 Bronze trinity, Shakyamuni and two Bodhisattvas. 623 C.E. Height of seated figure 86 cm. Horyuji, Nara, Japan (Propyläen Verlag)

and vine scroll reminds us of the disk behind the Sarnath Buddha's head. (Outside the circle the flames on the nimbus signify the Buddha light; seven small Buddhas allude to the Lotus Sutra's promise of an endless succession of future Buddhas.) But Indian prototypes did not travel across Asia unaltered. Whether in sculpture or in painting, the human body has never been the focus of artistic thinking in China. In Tori's trinity the Sarnath sculptor's priorities have been reversed. Shakyamuni's monastic robe is not notably austere even where it enfolds the inanimate lump of his body; when it cascades over the dais it becomes the chief visual argument for the miraculous nature of this being. Unlike the drapery of a classical figure, the robe tells us nothing about the body beneath – beneath most of it there is no body – and it bears no resemblance to cloth, but as a three-dimensional pattern it is voluptuous and breathtaking.

The vine scroll behind Shakyamuni's head, called a half-palmette scroll, belongs to a family of imaginary plants that includes also the vine on the

Hildesheim dish. On the dish, four distinct frondlike elements, all unknown to botanists, are joined by a stem formed of repeated arcs. Here a frond was cut in half and the halves were laid on alternate sides of a winding stem. Throughout Asia and Europe motifs like these have been copied and reworked for millennia. They originated in the second millennium BCE, in Egyptian floral borders contrived mostly from buds and flowers of lotus and papyrus – in Figure 8.3 Sety offers two buds and two flowers to Sokar – and in vaguely plantlike Minoan designs that had no real-world referent. Assyrian versions were adopted in Greece, reworked there, then carried westward by Rome, eastward by the conquests of Alexander and the spread of Buddhism.

[Fig. 8.18a–c] Buddhism spread to Southeast Asia and Indonesia direct from India. Its greatest monument in Indonesia is Borobudur, a stupa built in the eighth century (see Fig. 8.18a). In India the stupa is a burial mound. Erected over relics of the Buddha, it became Buddhism's first building type, an object of pilgrimage and worship. It is also Buddhism's central symbol, signifying the Buddha, the nirvana, and the Absolute. The ritual of worship at a stupa,



Figure 8.18a Borobudur. Central Java. Volcanic stone (andesite) masonry encasing an earthen core. Late eighth century CE (Photograph © Luca Invernizzi Tettoni)

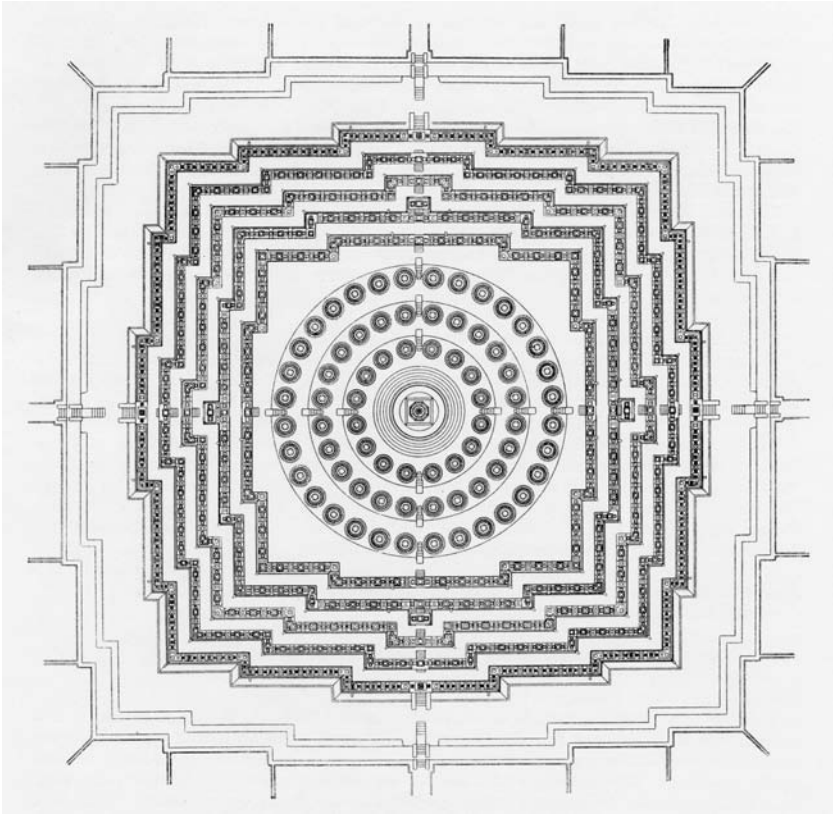


Figure 8.18b Plan of Borobudur. The outermost square is about 100 metres on a side.

regardless of its exact architectural form (in the Far East the pagoda), is circumambulation.

At Borobudur circumambulation takes place on a series of stepped terraces (see Fig. 8.18b). The first four terraces are square (a fifth one concealed in the base was buried unfinished, probably for reasons of stability). The pilgrim who climbs the stairs to the first terrace finds himself enclosed in a gallery with a high balustrade on one side and a wall on the other, his view forward and backward limited by kinks in the plan, the walls to either side covered with narrative reliefs. The reliefs, several kilometers of them, are done in a Javanese offshoot of the Gupta style we have met in the Buddha from Sarnath. The pilgrim works his way around each terrace studying the reliefs, and then climbs to the next terrace. The terraces represent planes of existence and stages of consciousness – higher and higher stages on the way



Figure 8.18c Borobudur. Central Java. Panel depicting the Shakyamuni Buddha bathing in a river just before his enlightenment (Photograph by Luca Invernizzi Tettoni)

to enlightenment – and the reliefs vary in theme accordingly. The reliefs of the buried terrace depict the world of desires; desires lead to rebirth. The next terrace, the first the pilgrim sees today, recounts the life of Shakyamuni, thereby teaching the path of escape from the cycle of rebirth. In the detail illustrated in Figure 8.18c, he bathes in the river just before his enlightenment, adored by celestial beings scattering flowers. The higher terraces illustrate the Gandavyuha sutra, which narrates the miracle-filled pilgrimage of the boy Sudhana, who seeks instruction from a series of teachers that culminates with the Buddha Maitreya. The reliefs vary in feeling from one level to the next. The world of desires is full of violence. The reliefs illustrating the life of Shakyamuni are serene. The reliefs higher up, when Sudhana reaches the jeweled paradise of Maitreya, are all stillness and bliss. The pilgrim who has studied them and completed the circuit of the square terraces ascends another staircase to the circular terraces. At this point he emerges from closed galleries into the open air, with sweeping views in all directions. He has risen from the world of forms to the world without form, from the world of samsara, the cycle of rebirth, to the realm of nirvana. Here on the circular terraces, seventy-two bell-shaped stupas have openings in their sides that give shadowy glimpses of Buddhas seated within. At the summit of the monument is a closed stupa.

Borobudur's stepped square lower part and round upper part connect it with a stupa type that originated in the early Buddhist art of Gandhara. From Hellenistic architectural decoration, Gandhara adopted the decorative system of statues in niches that we have seen in Trajan's nymphaeum, and this motif spread, in richly elaborated forms, throughout Indianized Asia. At Borobudur, niches set high on the inner walls of the galleries frame seated Buddhas, identified by their mudras, who face outward from the sides of the monument. The monument is oriented to the cardinal directions, and each side has ninety-two niches with ninety-two identical Buddhas: on the east Akshobhya, on the south Ratnasambhava, on the west Amitabha, on the north Amoghasiddhi. By the eighth century a magical form of Indian Buddhism heavily influenced by Hinduism had reached Java. Called Vajrayana or Esoteric Buddhism, it made much use of mandalas. A mandala is a diagram of the metaphysical structure of the cosmos centered on a sacred being; by meditating on it the believer seeks to re-incorporate himself into the mystic Absolute, that is, to achieve enlightenment. The two most important Vajrayana mandalas center on the Buddha Vairocana, who represents the Absolute, and on one of them he is surrounded by the Buddhas of the four directions, the same four as in the niches at Borobudur. Borobudur is thus a mandala as well as a stupa, and the pilgrim ascending from terrace to terrace is moving toward the center of the mandala.

This brief sketch does not exhaust the complexities of the monument. As Seckel says, sacred buildings always have some deeper meaning, and Borobudur has many, but interpretation is made difficult by the absence of inscriptions and the lack of any Buddhist text from Java of this period. But the reliefs on the terraces are an astonishing flowering of classical Javanese art: packed narrative scenes full of expression and activity, marvelously evoked plant and animal life, the musicality of dancers captured in motion, all hypnotically beautiful. A modern observer who knows the Tahitian paintings of Paul Gauguin will recognize some of the figure compositions in the Borobudur reliefs, for Gauguin owned a set of photographs of them.

[Fig. 8.19] Temple 23 at Yaxchilan was dedicated in 726 to the main consort of the city's ruler, Shield(?) Jaguar II (r. 681–742). A tomb beneath it may be hers (as she died in 749, the interment would have taken place well after the building of the temple). The lintel shown here is the central one of three placed over doors that looked onto the main plaza of the city. When it was in position, the side illustrated was parallel to the floor; the edge of the slab that faced toward the plaza displayed an



Figure 8.19 Lintel 25 from Yaxchilan Temple 23, the House of Queen Ixk'abal Xook. Limestone, 118 x 74 cm. Lintel dedicated 723 C.E. London, British Museum (© The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved)

inscription not visible here. Further inscriptions within the scene help us to understand what it depicts, but its meaning is complex and much remains obscure.¹

The bejeweled and richly dressed queen is supplying the food that war gods eat. She kneels holding a bowl that contains bloodletters (an obsidian blade, a stingray spine) and blood-spotted paper that will be burned in sacrifice. A bowl on the ground in front of her holds another blade and more bloody paper together with a thorn-studded cord that she has drawn through her tongue. What may be a curl of smoke begins with a cross-hatched hook under her right wrist and winds upward to end in a larger hook that embraces four glyphs. The queen gazes toward a youthful warrior armed with shield and spear who emerges from the jaws of a monstrous two-headed snake. The warrior has butterfly features (warrior souls were thought to reside in butterflies, which fluttered down to drink blood on the battlefield) and the attributes of the Mexican storm god Tlaloc. Part of Tlaloc's image is affixed to his headdress, part floats in front of his face, and the whole image is repeated issuing from the jaws at the other end of the snake.

The inscription on the lintel's edge refers to its dedication in 723, but the inscription that runs across the top of the scene and down its left side dates the action depicted to the day of Shield Jaguar's accession in 681. It says that the king is summoning a dynastic god, presumably the warrior emerging from the snake's jaws, who is probably to be identified with the king himself. But the summoning king is described as over sixty, not his age at his accession but his age when the lintel was made, so his old self is calling his young self to the throne. The lintel shows the queen because she was instrumental to the summons. A second inscription that begins with two small glyphs pendant from the king's text and continues further down with the four glyphs encircled by the smoke curl explains what the queen is doing. Impersonating a goddess, she offers incense at a place the inscription names, presumably in Yaxchilan. Thus, it would seem that her assistance at her husband's accession – some ritual she performed, theatrically perhaps, before an audience in one of the plazas of the city – is being celebrated, forty-two years after the event, in a building dedicated to her. The scenes on the other two lintels, both of which show queen and king together, are related in theme though they depict events dated to other years, 709 and 724. All three lintels

¹ For the interpretation given here I am indebted to Stephen Houston (pers. comm. Dec. 2011).

are signed by their carvers, whose names reveal that they were not from Yaxchilan.

The inscriptions that refer to the king and queen are easily recognized as writing even by viewers who do not read Maya hieroglyphic, but they are not the only writing in the scene. Much of its surface enrichment consists of glyphs or distinctive glyph parts. The stingray spine and obsidian blades, for example, are the glyphs that write those words; the cross-hatching on the curl of smoke is taken from the glyph “black,” as are the bloody spots on the paper and the spots on the warrior’s headdress that identify it as jaguar pelt. These are not just visual enrichments but enrichments of meaning, and they pervade Maya art. Because Maya word signs are ultimately pictorial in origin, and because their identity resides less in fixed contours than in diagnostic markings, they can combine with representational elements in endlessly varied ways. A glyph, or just a distinctive part of it, may stand in for the object it names; a container may be labeled with its contents; the throne a ruler sits on may be his name, or his name may form part of his headdress – a part that stands out only for the literate viewer. This interpenetration of art and writing, seen not only in stone carving but also in supremely accomplished painted ceramics, assures us that the artists and their patrons were not merely literate but highly sophisticated literates. The Maya writing system itself, at least in the manifestations of it that survive, was the province of great artists.

Setting and audience

For the works introduced in the foregoing pages, our information about original settings and intended audiences varies enormously. The Arch of Constantine has not moved since it was built, and though the city around it has changed, the setting in which the Roman public saw it and the processional route it straddles can be reconstructed. The interior decoration of some Pompeiian villas is still in place (much of the best has been cut out and removed to museums), and we know what sort of people it was made for and seen by. They were, among other things, people who collected objects like the Hildesheim dish. We know far less about the lintel from Yaxchilan. Archaeologists can reconstruct the building it belonged to, indeed the entire complex of buildings around the plaza it overlooked, but what went on in or in front of the buildings and who had access to them are questions to which only very general answers can be given. The making of the Book of Kells was no doubt an act of devotion, and once made it became an object of

devotion itself, but where it was kept and how it was used are undocumented. Tori's bronze trinity still sits on the altar of an image hall, beneath a jeweled canopy from which music-making angels descend (its setting and even part of Shakyamuni's nimbus have been cropped out of our illustration). But the teaching Buddha from Sarnath comes to us detached from its original context. Its worshippers probably saw it against a surround of architecture and other images, things with the power both to enrich meanings and to shape response. As for the bowl from Nishapur, experts on Abbasid Iran can only guess what stratum of society could afford it and would enjoy its calligraphy and its proverb.

Setting and audience matter because they are clues to the purposes that shaped a work, clues to the effect it was meant to have. We need those clues because apart from the object itself we have so little else. For many of the works illustrated here, the patron is unknown to us. For none of them do we have any written record of the patron's wishes; we can only assume that what he wanted is what he got. But did Constantine ask the makers of his arch for regimented friezes that would clash with the classical roundels above them, or was he oblivious to the difference of style? Either way, how do we account for the new style? Our goal is to understand any work as the response of its designers and executants to the situation in which they find themselves, "situation" being understood to include their patron's demands and resources, the materials and technology available to them, and their training and experience of existing works. Our knowledge of these factors is never complete, but no historian ever works from complete knowledge. We do our best with what we have, and we must begin from a clear awareness that most of the works we study were not made to serve as furnishings of an art museum.

Functions of art

Writers of a philosophical bent have sometimes defined art as "useless things," but the effort to distinguish "aesthetic" from "utilitarian" leads only to confusion. Of what possible use is a definition that excludes architecture from the realm of the aesthetic? To suppose that a work of art had no function is to forget the purposes of the patron or even to forget that there was a patron. It is also often a way of reassuring ourselves that nothing was lost when an object or fragment was transplanted from its original context of use into a museum. This, of course, amounts to assuming that it was made for display in the setting in which we see it, an assumption that in

the case of almost everything in the Metropolitan Museum would be incorrect. As the works introduced above show, objects designed for visual effect have performed a host of functions. There can be few human purposes that art has not at one time or another been called upon to serve.

The tasks that Buddhism set its artists have been listed by Seckel:

building religious edifices for ritual purposes and for monastic life; creating valid images to convey the idea of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas, monks, and other sacred personages; representing "sacred history," the treasury of stories and legends, with their abundance of narrative motifs; setting up a vocabulary of symbols to convey the main religious ideas; and, last but not least, devising convincing visual images of the world's metaphysical structure, and especially the structure of the spheres lying beyond the limits of the empirical terrestrial world.

The works of Buddhist art presented above illustrate most of the functions on Seckel's list, and readers will probably have no difficulty supplying Christian counterparts for all of them. They represent art in the service of a missionary religion that addresses its doctrines to all strata of society.

Art in the service of rulers serves their interests, and their first interest is power. Statues of the king in public places make him a permanent presence. Constantine's arch, even if the initiative for it came from the Senate, was meant to enhance his power, to which the Senate looked for stability in troubled times. The Yaxchilan lintel, however dimly we understand it, is about securing power, and the Assyrian king's lion hunt is a dramatic display of power. Because ideologies of power derive it from the gods, royal religion and political legitimation are inseparable. The king's religion, Sety's or Shield Jaguar's, centers on his transactions with the gods or, in the case of the Anyang king, with his ancestors. When rulers in Cambodia or China are identified as incarnations of the Buddha, or when European kings rule by divine right, this shows missionary religions and secular powers coming to terms with each other. Mosaics in the church of San Vitale in Ravenna show Justinian, his empress, and their attendants approaching the high altar (548 CE); reliefs in the Binyang temple in north China show the Northern Wei emperor, empress, and their court bringing offerings to the Buddha (523 CE). Neither ensemble seems different in underlying purpose from Sety's reliefs or even, perhaps, from the relief on the Yaxchilan lintel. Another recurrent theme in royal art is the king triumphing over a defeated enemy: the pharaoh smiting enemies of Egypt, Darius king of kings receiving captives on a cliff at Bisutun, the Sassanian king Shapur triumphing over a Roman emperor on another cliff, Maya kings humiliating prisoners. Victors

are larger, more richly dressed, on horseback or otherwise towering over the vanquished. The iconography of dominance in such scenes is a cross-cultural universal.

The needs of the elite are similar to the king's, if less extravagantly supplied. Their competition for status, like his, employs display, and display mobilizes luxury possessions of every imaginable kind, from palaces to Pompeiian villas, from the robes of Shield Jaguar's queen to jades like the Nan Yue king's. Yet we must not make the mistake of supposing that social competition is the sole reason for the existence of these things. Rich clothing and jewels are not worn solely to inspire envy in others. Luxuries give pleasure. Pompeiian villas answered the requirements of a particular form of social life, but they were also pleasant to live in, and they would have been less pleasant if their walls had been bare. To an extent we find hard to conceive, the rich and powerful of the past lived lives in which everything – books, houses, entertainments, clothing – was designed by artists. The most ordinary practical possessions of a king were beautiful because . . . why should he be obliged to look at anything that was not? Art historians have tended to be less interested in ornaments and luxuries than in art with a message; art with anything resembling verbal content invites exegesis, which is what academics do. But throughout history patrons have spent fortunes to make things ravishing.

A further realm of art intensely important to the elite is death and the afterlife. Whatever the prevailing conception of the afterlife, if it was life of any kind, it required art. An Egyptian tomb required a statue of the deceased to accept food offerings. Its walls depicted things he possessed in this life and counted on in the next, his wealth and his pleasures. Funerary art also serves purposes for the living. It can comfort the bereaved; it can bolster claims to inheritance. The ancestor portraits cherished by Roman patricians were the focus of family pride, tokens of achievement and ideals. The bronze vessels that accumulated on the altars of Chinese ancestral temples had the same function, as the inscriptions of early first-millennium BCE examples attest.

Human purposes rarely being simple, most works of art have more than one function. Religious art both teaches and persuades. A tomb may be built both to secure the afterlife of one king and to assert the legitimacy of his successor. Gardens can be places of relaxation and metaphors for paradise. The Parthenon was the home of a goddess, the site of offerings to her and of festivals in her honor, but it was also an assertion of civic pride and power addressed to the whole Greek world. All these functions require design, or are better served by good design.

The collecting of art, which removes works from their original settings and deprives them of their original functions, is not a new phenomenon. The Romans were collectors on a vast scale; it was their appetite for Greek art that stripped Greek sanctuaries and created the classical tradition. For them, as for many before and after, art was one of the fruits of conquest (think of Napoleon, who sought to make Paris a new Rome). Chinese aristocrats collected ancient jades at least as early as 1200 BCE, and in Mesopotamia and Egypt the collecting of antiquities is known even earlier. Whether done by an emperor or an art museum, collecting changes the function of an object. A statue that in Greece was worshipped becomes an ornament for a Roman villa or a museum exhibit. The museum is at once the greatest advocate for art and the greatest obstacle to understanding it.

Materials

Elite patrons monopolize the finest materials and artists, and their artists use and often invent the highest technology of their time. The most daring premodern engineering is found in architectural marvels such as the Pantheon in Rome and Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. The most sophisticated premodern metallurgy is found in decorative techniques: granulation, depletion gilding, pattern-block casting, pattern welding, chemical surface treatments, and many more. Fine craftsmanship, rare or exotic materials, building stone transported over long distances, hard materials difficult to work, all these speak of wealth and power. Durable materials seek to conquer time. The hunger of civilized centers for the raw materials they prized has often had transformative effects on simpler societies thousands of kilometers away. The demand for turquoise in Central Mexico had such effects in the American Southwest. Afghanistan was the ancient world's sole supplier of the lapis lazuli seen in the beard of Tutankhamun's gold mask and, ground into ultramarine, in the blue pigment on the Kells Chi-rho page. The procurement of metals for use in art was a major enterprise in many ancient societies, and it is not just precious metals that were sought. Pliny reports that in the first century CE the island of Rhodes still had 3,000 bronze statues and that Athens, Olympia, and Delphi had similar numbers. In China one tomb of the fifth century BCE contained ten metric tons of bronze.

Cultural preferences for specific materials were established very early, often in prehistoric times. Some persist to this day. Even materials that are prized in many cultures – gold, silver, turquoise – are prized in different degree. Favorites in Egypt, from a very early time, were ivory, gold, linen,

and polished stone; in China, silk, jade, bronze, lacquer, and high-fired ceramics; in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, turquoise, jade, obsidian, and feathers; in the Andes, gold, silver, and wool. Whatever contributed to the establishment of these preferences, it was not merely local availability. China and Egypt both have fine stone, but in China stone was not used even for buildings until a comparatively late period, while in Mesopotamia, which lacked it, it was used for statuary even though it had to be imported.

A design is likely to be in some sense natural to the material in which it was invented. The carver in soft stone has no difficulty making a shape that is extravagantly three-dimensional. The smith whose patron tells him to copy the shape in hammered gold faces considerable difficulty. The bronze caster told to make it will have trouble forming and venting the mold. In such cases the metalworker's response to the patron's demand can involve modification of the design or technical innovation or both. The lost-wax process may well have been invented in response to such a demand.

Nevertheless the transfer of designs from one material to another happens often. An appealing design may be transferred from the material in which it was invented to any or all of the other materials currently in use. When one material is replaced by another in a particular function (in buildings, wood by stone; in containers, pottery by metal), trifling details native to the old material may be copied in the new one, perhaps simply because they have become so familiar that their absence would surprise. Basketweave patterns of no great intrinsic interest have sometimes been copied in media such as Roman mosaic because a pattern simple to create in three dimensions becomes a tricky challenge in two.

Certain art forms, perhaps because of the resources invested in them and the talent they consequently attract, are particularly fertile sources of designs. Architecture, which urgently needs ornament to break up blank surfaces and articulate boring volumes, has supplied it to other arts in abundance. The Romans turned Greek post-and-lintel structure into surface ornament, married it to a different structure (an engineering based on arches and concrete), and propagated the result throughout their empire. The cornices and moldings and vegetal motifs of their architecture are all around us, in objects large and small, because the needs they satisfy in buildings – to articulate, embellish, and relieve monotony – are not limited to buildings. Nor are they confined to Europe and the Mediterranean. The plant ornament of classical buildings, which originated in Egypt and Crete, spread across Asia as far as Java and Japan. It was this part of Greek art, not the statues of gods and athletes, that the rest of the world has found irresistible.

Ornament

This is a vexed category. No writer has been able to give a definition that meaningfully connects all the things to which the words “ornament” and “decoration” are commonly applied. But three important design families to which they are uncontroversially applied deserve comment. The most important, ornament constructed from plants, has been introduced in connection with the Hildesheim dish, the Sarnath Buddha, and the Horyuji bronze trinity (and plant ornament frames the reliefs at Borobudur). The plants, usually imaginary, are sometimes two-dimensional (as in Greek vase painting), sometimes three-dimensional (especially in architecture), sometimes both: Roman mosaicists, fascinated with the illusory third dimension, depicted monstrous three-dimensional versions inhabited by birds and animals. Vegetal ornament ultimately of Egyptian and Minoan origin ranges from Greek palmettes and Corinthian columns to all the arabesques of Islamic ornament, including the border patterns of Persian rugs. Its history and geographical spread are probably unrivaled by any other theme in the history of art. Before 1492 there seems to have been nothing quite like it in the New World, though flowers were important motifs in Mesoamerican art. Its usual functions are articulating (imposing structure), enriching (thus declaring the importance of the object enriched), and framing (declaring the self-sufficiency of what is framed).

Ornament based on animals, real or imaginary, has had a more limited role in art because it is ill-suited to be a frame for something else. Animals are centers of attention. In Figure 8.4, inspection of other parts of the object always ends by returning to the eyes. Ornament constructed from imaginary animals dominated art in China until about the time of the Nan Yue king's dragon-and-bird jade, the second century BCE, when the rise of figural art marginalized it. In Europe the greatest animal ornament is that of Insular manuscripts.

Ornament that evokes neither plants nor animals we might call geometrical. Simple examples are fret patterns. Among the most complex are the geometrical patterns of Islamic ornament and the roundels on the Kells Chi-rho page, intricate compasswork constructions inherited from Celtic art. Under this heading we might also include interlace, which all over the world originates in the imitation of baskets and textiles. Roman mosaics that depict a lattice of interwoven ribbons intrigue because of the designer's skill in arranging light and dark so as to create the illusion of ribbons passing over

and under each other in three dimensions. The makers of Insular gospel books mastered this device – apparent lights and shadows that the perceptual system interprets as evidence of a third dimension – and then made interlace enthralling by giving the ribbons heads and limbs. Because the viewer who has detected a bit of an animal cannot resist searching for the rest, converting ribbons to animals enabled the scribes to complicate their interlace fantastically, adding colors that sometimes help disentangle but sometimes mislead. The summit of this art is the carpet pages of the Lindisfarne Gospels of about 700 CE.

Writing

Though not an art of high prestige in our culture, in all the ancient literate civilizations writing had major artistic roles, sometimes from the moment of its invention. It figures in more than a third of the works illustrated here. In Egypt and the Maya cities, beautiful writing might stand alone, but it was also part of the fabric of pictorial art. On the Arch of Constantine, the Pantheon, and the Column of Trajan, handsome inscriptions dedicate and dignify public monuments. In the Book of Kells writing becomes a thing of awe and magic. In the Islamic world it derives special status from association with the Qur'an. In China it has long been the most admired of the visual arts; by the fifth century CE China had a full-fledged art market in calligraphy, with all the usual concomitants, including forgers and critics. Almost any function performed by everyday writing can be performed in a more exalted or dignified or pleasing way by fine writing. It can beautify a sacred text; it can also, as on the Nishapur bowl, make a sentiment worthy of a fortune cookie into an object of delight. It can be done for an audience of one in a Book of Hours, for the public at large in a royal proclamation carved into a cliff, for the gods alone in a location sealed from human view. Display inscriptions serve endlessly varied functions, and no literate culture is without them.

Beautiful writing had several origins and takes several forms. In Mesopotamia writing originated in bookkeeping, and it did not acquire artistic functions until its use had spread to such elite concerns as the labeling of figural scenes on royal monuments. The qualities it then cultivated had arisen earlier from the pride and professionalism of the scribe, whose advancement must always have depended on his hand, but once the elite had seen the possibilities of fine writing for display, the scribal artist became a specialist. In China the inscriptions on ritual bronzes were the work of specialists whose everyday writing was done with brush and ink but who

used a stylus to produce the soft clay originals needed by the bronze caster, cultivating fine writing in a medium used for no other purpose and in the process creating a distinctive script style native to it.

Most signs of the Chinese and Mesopotamian writing systems began as pictographs but within a few centuries had, like the letters of our alphabet, lost all trace of iconicity. In Egypt and Mesoamerica, by contrast, writing never lost its iconicity. In both places artistic systems that combine writing and pictorial art seem to have come into being along with writing itself. The scripts ancestral to Maya writing may have originated in vocabularies of religious iconography. Egyptian writing may have arisen in a context of royal display. In both civilizations, allowing writing to lose its pictorial content would have disrupted arts that served indispensable functions. The creation of the Egyptian system may actually have been part of the rise of kingship; the cognitively complex, ideology-laden hybrid of writing and pictures we see on the walls of Sety's temple was the invention of early third-millennium courtiers with artistic gifts and a political agenda. Sety's relief and the one from Yaxchilan do not begin to exhaust the possibilities of the two systems, which are far too complex for description here. But it should be emphasized that, wherever writing is central to the art of the elite, that elite was literate. Maya temples, Roman monuments, and Chinese bronzes were not supplied with inscriptions for the benefit of scribes.

The paths to beauty in writing are diverse. The lettering of Roman monuments was an art of design that sought one perfectly satisfying form for each letter. Shapes and proportions of main elements and serifs were exquisitely calculated, as was the shape of the cut chiselled into the stone, though adjustments of size and spacing were made during the writing of an inscription to prevent monotony and give life. Similarly, the hieroglyphs of Egyptian inscriptions, whether they accompanied pictures or not, were more designed than written. All trace of hand and process was suppressed.

In Chinese writing this has never been the goal. Chinese writers are taught that exact repetition is deadening and that a character which appears more than once in a piece of writing should look different at each appearance. This aesthetic governs even monumental inscriptions, which reproduce every nuance of a handwritten original. Knowledgeable viewers mentally reenact the process of writing, stroke by stroke. Emphasis on hand and process may reflect the value that elite practitioners attached to handwriting as an expression of a gentleman's character. Though beautiful writing had existed already in the Bronze Age, in the fourth century CE men of status made it into a class recreation, and soon thereafter imperial patronage made it a

precondition of high rank. The art of writing became calligraphy, a sort of cult, distinguished not by anything in the writing itself but by a set of social practices surrounding writing. The word has similar connotations in the Islamic world.

The decorations in the Book of Kells represent a third and more unusual path to the beautification of writing. The Insular majuscule of the main text, like all the forms of writing discussed so far, sought beauty in the forms of the letters. But the big letters on the Chi-rho page were made beautiful by the addition of dazzlingly colored ornaments unrelated to writing; smaller bursts of ornament were attached to the small ink letters on other pages. The impulse to decorate writing with ornaments that relate neither to the letters nor to the content of the text treats letters as precious objects.

Representation, human activity, and the human figure

Representation, art that depicts something, is no easier to define than ornament. The plants on the Hildesheim dish and the animals on the Chinese bronze are imaginary. The palmettes on the dish were not drawn by artists looking at real palmettes, for there is no such plant. To call them depictions seems wrong; it would misstate the way they were invented. But how should we draw a line between them and art that does depict? Is the image of Sokar in Sety's temple a depiction? Shakyamuni on the altar at Horyuji? Similar questions could be asked about scenes of figures – human or divine, active or still – and about landscapes. The reliefs at Borobudur were not created by artists sketching the action as it happened. For Egyptian viewers the relief of Ramose's brother was an image of him, but it would not have helped them pick him out on the streets of ancient Thebes. Images with even less objective resemblance to anything human have been accepted as portraits by other cultures, including ours (see Picasso's *Portrait of Kahnweiler*). To make a marble head a head of Socrates, a Cubist painting a portrait of Kahnweiler, or an Assyrian relief the Sack of Lachish, we need a label. Perhaps we should put aside as unhelpful what might be called a photographic theory of representation, which supposes that the camera captures what the world "really" looks like and that art is representational if it approximates a photograph (to some unspecified degree). We should ask not about resemblance but about intentions, relying on labels, functional contexts, and cautious guesswork to decide how an artist meant his image to be understood by viewers. We should be alert to a range of possibilities. A relief showing an

Assyrian king killing lions could be a celebration of a particular hunt or the eternal enactment of a royal ritual or both at once. What it was not striving to be is a snapshot, and its power to move the beholder does not depend on approximating a snapshot.

In artistic traditions that have made use of representation, the focus has usually been on humans, gods, animals, and their activity. Other themes have tended to emerge as by-products of these – landscape for instance as a background for figures. Whether in two dimensions or three, arrangements of figures might be sorted into two rough categories, one that involves action or storytelling and one that does not. Sety before Sokar, Assurbanipal's lion hunt, the infant Hercules strangling serpents, Shakyamuni bathing in the river, all these would fall into the first group. Art of this kind serves countless purposes. What distinguishes it from the second category is the asymmetry of real life. As we saw at Horyuji, sacred figures are often presented in arrangements whose symmetry, frontality, and hierarchical scale drain them of narrative content and distance them from our world. Apart from the mudras, the Horyuji trinity lacks all trace of narrative. The relative positions of the three figures tell us not where they stand, in this world or any other, but how they relate theologically. A king and his court can be depicted in the same way, for similar reasons. A Byzantine silver plate from 388 CE shows three frontal figures, a very large emperor Theodosius flanked by two small co-emperors. The configuration makes a slight compromise between presenting the emperor as a god and depicting an imperial act, for the emperor's right hand unobtrusively gives a silver plate to a tiny bowing figure, but his power to inspire awe does not suffer. The same symmetry governs the regimented friezes on Constantine's arch, each of which centers on a frontal image of the emperor gazing at the beholder (in the classical roundels above them the emperor is harder to find). In the Ravenna mosaics, locating Justinian and Theodora in a symmetrical scheme centered on the altar draws them into the suburbs of a divine realm. Symmetry is one of art's most powerful devices, partly because we are seldom aware of how it is affecting us.

Images of single figures, in two dimensions or three, show a similar range of effects. An asymmetrical figure, a discus-thrower for example, belongs to our world. A symmetrical statue in an Egyptian tomb is timeless. Images that make eye contact involve the beholder psychologically. The feeling that an image in some way partakes of the nature of the person or god depicted – the feeling that images can come alive – is of course part of their attraction. But for the same reason, images can inspire unease or fear, and they have

sometimes, in some contexts, been proscribed (Judaism, Islam, Byzantine iconoclasm, the Protestant Reformation). Images of gods – a cult statue, or a mosaic Christ in the dome of a church – are places where gods can manifest themselves and where humans can communicate with them. Portraits can preserve a likeness, but as we have seen, this is not always their function. The subject may instead want a face that conforms to some ideal of beauty or gravity, or a face that looks like the ruler's; the ruler may want a face that looks like his or her god's; or the subject may only need a substitute to act for him or her in some capacity in which a generic face will do. In all cases, inscriptions or attributes or context will supply identification.

Art that reduces the three-dimensional world to two dimensions has special problems and possibilities. One problem, that of maintaining intelligibility, is brilliantly solved in the detail reproduced here of Assurbanipal's lion hunt. Another is the trade-off between two-dimensional design and the illusion of a world behind the picture surface. The Egyptian artist opted for surface design, which allowed pictures and writing to mix (Fig. 8.3); Roman painters opted for making the surface vanish from our awareness (Fig. 8.10). The picture frame, a leitmotif of Roman art, is a window frame, a signal to the viewer that "here a different space begins." The illusory third dimension has great fascinations, and no one explored it more inventively than the Romans, not only in pictures but also in geometrical patterns. However, as modern cartoonists are well aware, illusion has a cost in legibility; storytelling is more immediate and engaging without it. This was well understood by the painters of Maya vases, whose ability to capture body language is perhaps rivalled only by depictions of the dance in Indian art. A century ago art historians had constructed only one history of pictorial art, the story of a progress that began in classical antiquity, suffered a setback in the Middle Ages, and resumed in the Renaissance. In this story the Greeks were credited with supplying essential techniques, such as foreshortening, that all other cultures had failed to discover. As art history broadened to include non-European cultures, the techniques were found to be not uniquely western, while western painting itself began to look more idiosyncratic, less easy to characterize as a scientific quest for optical truth. Since no two-dimensional picture can convey all the information present in a three-dimensional scene, the painter must choose, and if choice is possible, multiple histories of painting are possible, none with a unique claim to optical truth. And, of course, some traditions have not sought optical truth. Cultures that have asked different things of pictorial art have created different pictures (for

example, the evangelist portraits in the Book of Kells). The traditional formula “an increasingly accurate approximation to nature” is not an adequate account even of the history of western painting.

The geographical broadening of art history also led to the discovery that human subject matter, pictures, and even representation itself, though widespread, are not universals. Bernard Berenson said that the drawing of the female nude is the highest task of art; a fifth-century Athenian might have said the male nude. It is now more obvious than it once was that these are statements not about art but about the culture of the speaker. A few artistic traditions, notably those of ancient China and the Andean civilizations, have shown little interest in the human image, human activities, even in representation itself. The Inka made gold and silver cult images of gods and rulers, but otherwise their art consisted mainly of utensils and personal ornaments, patterned textiles and pottery, and megalithic buildings. Their most awe-inspiring visual statements were stone walls whose baffling masonry wrote power on the landscape. As for China, in the first thousand years of Chinese civilization art was almost synonymous with ornament constructed from imaginary animals. The human image was rare and unimportant, there were no pictures, and there were no images of gods or rulers. Cult images arrived in China with Buddhism. The first statues of Chinese rulers set up in public places date from the twentieth century (statues of Chairman Mao seated in an armchair are copied from the Lincoln Memorial). This lack of interest in portraiture and tepid interest in representation are, like their opposites, cultural orientations that originated in prehistoric times for reasons we are unlikely ever to know. They have large consequences for the way we visualize the past. The name Tutankhamun immediately brings to mind a face; for ancient Chinese rulers we have only names. Egyptian tomb reliefs show us life in ancient Egypt; the art of ancient China tells us little about ancient China beyond what its art looked like.

Artists

The makers of art have varied widely in social status. The architects of Hagia Sophia ranked higher than the artists who made its mosaics; cameo makers at the Roman imperial court sometimes had greater fame than sculptors or painters; the signatures of Maya vase painters sometimes identify them as members of the royal family. But whatever his art or status, the artist is likely to have learned his trade by some sort of apprenticeship, and his training will have centered on the copying of existing works. The apprentice,

who through long practice had acquired the ability to reproduce what the master of the workshop made, had mastered his craft. He had also internalized the tastes and standards of his patrons, the recent achievements of his art, and the existing repertory of designs. In these circumstances, competence was easy to judge, and the judgment of art was less problematic than it is today. In some times and places, competence has included mimetic skills, but the pursuit of mimesis has many facets, from the careful rendering of shadows in Greek and Roman painting to the lively narrative of Maya vase painting, and it has often been subordinated to other goals, such as the order and legibility demanded by Egyptian patrons or the supernatural awe inspired by Byzantine churches and Maya temples.

For both artist and patron, the starting point for a new work is existing works. All continuity in the history of art – continuity of style, technique, object types, designs, subject matter – follows from this. The patron asks for what he already knows; the artist starts from what he has previously made or seen. But many factors act to promote change. Some are social, such as the competition of patrons for prestige and of artists for patronage. The patron may ask not for what he knows but for some variation on it that will put old versions in the shade; the artist may invent something new to catch the attention of a patron. Invention is likely also to have intrinsic appeal for both artist and patron. The aesthetic response involves difference. This is not a social fact but a fact of perceptual psychology. Repetition and sameness dull response; change refreshes it. Conformity to existing styles may sometimes be enjoined by strong forces, and in any society some novelties will fail to catch on, but the conservatism of exotic traditions has often been overstated by observers only casually acquainted with them. Egyptian statues, Greek vases, Maya reliefs all look alike to observers who have not learned to tell them apart, but their original owners saw differences, and Egyptologists, Hellenists, and Mayanists learn to see them too. A good Egyptologist can date a statue by its style.

Art historians looking back over centuries of artistic production sometimes find patterns of long-term change that appear so logical as to seem predestined. Particularly when the period under study is too remote to have left any written record of the thinking of artists or patrons, historians have sometimes been tempted to replace human actors with disembodied agents such as the spirit of the time (*Zeitgeist*), the spirit of the people (*Volksgeist*), or some inner drive of the artistic forms themselves. These entities change, we are told, obeying mysterious laws of their own, and their changes cause the changes visible in the works. One effect of such explanations is to deprive

patrons and artists of agency; the artist has no choice but to create what the *Zeitgeist* tells him to. To avoid this descent into metaphysics, we must keep our eyes firmly fixed on individuals, even if we do not know their names. Many things condition the patron's demands, and many more condition the artist's response, but all external factors, from passing fashion to political repression, act through individuals, with consequences that are never wholly predictable. The works of a given time and place have features in common – the features we point to when we speak of a period style or a national style – because of their common point of departure in what already exists. The concentration of artists at royal courts can act powerfully to create a unified style, not least by inspiring emulation beyond the court, and consistency of style across media is sometimes promoted by artists who work in more than one medium. But however logical and systematic change may seem in retrospect, at the time it is happening its direction is open. The actors in the history of art are the patron and the artist. The history of art is the history of their decisions.

Belief in a spirit of the time or race has been appealing for some art historians not only because it seemed to explain long-term patterns but also because it held out the prospect that art history might make a contribution to “real” history. If the style of the work – the style of the regimented figures on Constantine's arch for example – expresses the *Zeitgeist*, should not the skilled art historian be able to read the *Zeitgeist* out of the work? Should he not be able to furnish new, independent information to the “real” historian? The interpretation of works of art as symptoms of the society that produced them, keys to its essence or spirit or inner life, has been one of art history's major preoccupations, but not one of its major successes. A great deal more has been read into images than out of them. Something similar could be said about attempts to relate the visual arts of a given time to contemporary music, literature, and other cultural phenomena, all presumed to express a single *Zeitgeist*. Both Bach and Rembrandt are routinely called Baroque artists, but nowadays it is increasingly often confessed that this means only that they both lived in Europe a few hundred years ago. The spirit or inner life of a society or a time is a figment of the historical imagination, one that ascribes a real past existence to a retrospective generalization.

Our understanding of art and artists has been shaped in unfortunate ways by European developments of the last few centuries. Italian Renaissance efforts to win higher social status for the makers of certain kinds of art have made it customary to distinguish “artists” (workers in “the fine arts”) from “craftsmen” (“minor arts”). But the merit of a work is not measured by

the social status of its maker, and we should be wary of allowing taboos on the use of the word “artist” to impose unconsidered value judgments. Sorting the world’s art into Renaissance categories – architecture, sculpture, painting, and minor arts – distorts our understanding even of Renaissance art, not least by removing “sculptures” and “paintings” from larger ensembles. Equally unfortunate consequences have flowed from the social-climbing artist’s anxiety to downplay the role of manual labor in his profession. The pretense that the making of a work falls into two separate stages, a creative stage that produces the work complete in the artist’s head (“conception”) and a mechanical one unworthy of notice (“execution”) makes the artist into a white-collar worker whose ideas never change or grow in the course of making, one who never gets ideas from the interaction of his hands with his materials. This separation of invention from execution is untrue to the experience of most artists. Even in the realm of the architect and the industrial designer, initial conceptions never completely determine the final appearance of the work.

Further distortions have been imposed by the Romantic cult of artistic genius, which insists that the work of art is the creation of a solitary inspired hand. Most works are collaborative – buildings, films, bronze statuary, Egyptian reliefs – and to insist that only one member of the team is creative while the rest are “mere executants” is to turn a blind eye to realities, including the reality that many artists do their best work under the stimulus of collaboration. Other legacies of Romanticism are the cult of the unique work of art (which cannot logically be reconciled with the value we set on old master prints) and the demand for originality before all else. These prejudices are so deep and widespread as to have exerted a large and harmful influence on the study of art. Perhaps the worst misconception is that the artist today is in some essential way different from his predecessors. If artists in our day, to quote one observer, “transcend established aesthetic traditions by dramatic acts of personal creativity,” this is only because that is what the art market demands of them.

Conclusion

What survives of ancient art today is mostly what was made in durable materials, and most of it is in some way altered or in ruins. Even monuments that are substantially intact have lost their marble cladding or their original coloring. Much that was polychrome lives in our imaginations bleached. Further damage is done when objects or fragments are transferred from their

original settings to the art museum. A statue of a prophet in the gallery of a museum does not make the effect it did when it was part of a group clustered at the portal of a cathedral. And much of our experience of art is an experience not even of objects but of book illustrations, which reduce great buildings and small ornaments to the same size, flatten them, and, more often than not, render them in shades of gray. Buildings enclose us and take control of our experience in a way that photographs of buildings do not. Reduced to illustrations, the objects discussed in this chapter have lost much of the visual power that was their *raison d'être*. To understand why art mattered to the patrons who commissioned it, we must try to recover, in imagination at least, what ancient viewers actually saw. This demands both knowledge and sympathy, and it is not easy.

Works of art can supply the historian with information of many kinds. Our knowledge of premodern technology, for example, rests not on texts but on technical study of the most sophisticated artifacts. The vast geographical distribution of the animal-combat motif tells us about cultural contact and exchange across Asia. Egyptian tomb reliefs tell us things no text could about life in ancient Egypt. (The historian seeking information from pictorial art must exercise caution, however; if we overlook the purpose for which a picture was made, we are likely to misinterpret what it shows.) But these contributions are not the only reasons for including a chapter on art in a history of the world. Art belongs in a world history less because it is a source of information about other things than because it is itself a part of history. Not a very important part, we might suppose, if we judged by the role of “the fine arts” in our own society, but that would be a bad way to judge. In most times and places art has mattered enormously, for a host of reasons, and a good historian will take it as seriously as its patrons and practitioners did.

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Pastoral nomads

TIMOTHY MAY

The ancient Central Eurasian steppes stretched from Manchuria in the east to the Alföld Plain in Hungary and Romania in the west. While often conceived of as a flat expanse of plains, the steppes varied considerably. Although much of it comprised grasslands, the ancient and medieval steppes were broken and subdivided by rivers, hills, mountains, and even deserts across the Eurasian world, thus dividing it into regions with the northern area bounded by the taiga forests of Siberia as well as wetlands.

While nomadism varied considerably across the world, steppe pastoral nomads subsisted largely on the dairy products of their animals, such as cheese, yogurt, and cheese curds, supplemented with meat from their animals as well as from hunting. The slaughter of their herds and flocks of horses, sheep, goats, cows or yaks, and camels was carefully controlled, as the animals also served as the nomad's wealth. Many observers remarked on the nomads' love of *kumiss*, or fermented mare's milk, which the nomads drank in abundance in the summer after the foaling season. In addition to serving as food sources, animal by-products such as wool, hair, and leather provided the nomads materials for most, but not all, of their needs. Trading with sedentary societies was necessary as pastoral nomadism was not completely self-sufficient.¹ Often a symbiotic commercial relationship developed with sedentary neighbors. In exchange for animal products and animals (horses in particular), the nomads received silk, grains, weapons, tools, and other luxury items. If trading was not permitted, warfare also served as a means of securing goods.

1 For a detailed discussion on the self-sufficiency of pastoral nomadism, see Anatoly M. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World*, 2nd edn., trans. Julia Crookenden (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983). Also see Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

The nomads did not wander aimlessly in search of grass and water. To prevent overgrazing, families often lived by themselves or in small clusters with their flocks and herds and rotated their pastures seasonally. Living in round shelters known most commonly as yurts, which were constructed from wooden lattice walls and covered by layers of felt, nomads could easily disassemble their yurts and load them on camels or wagons. The entire camp could pack and move relatively quickly and on short notice. Tribal migration also occurred when vast numbers of camps moved, often because they had been displaced by a more powerful neighbor.

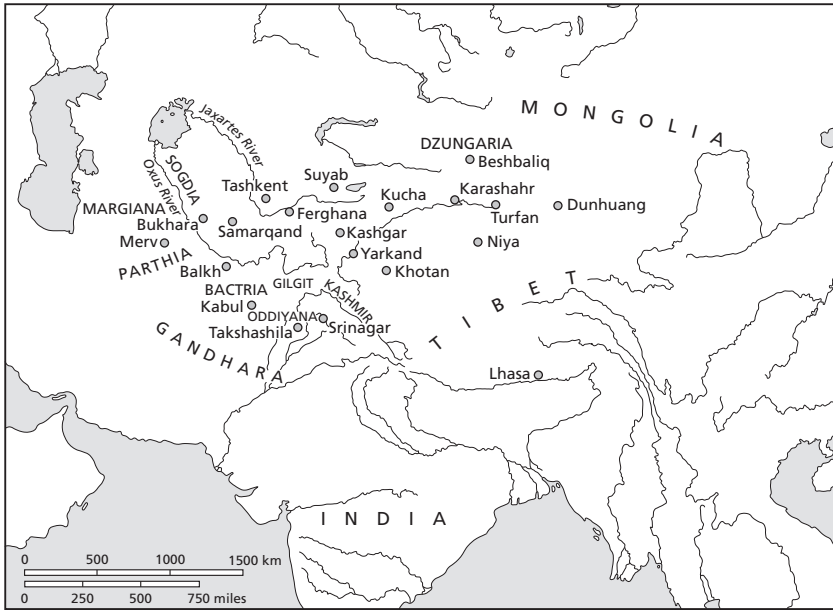
But what is a tribe? Following the example of Rudi Lindner, a tribe is a socio-political group based on, but not limited to, familial ties of a real or fictive ancestor. The identity is taken from the dominant group where the kinship (if it existed) actually mattered. Membership of the tribe varied through time and as members came and went, both willingly and unwillingly. Nonetheless, as long as the dominant element maintained its hegemony over the subgroups, the identity of the tribe remained that of the ruling element.² This is not to say that the ruling elite had complete dominance. Tribal leaders consulted and listened to the concerns of the subgroup leaders. While leaders did not always heed their advice, failing to do so repeatedly undermined the relationship, thus making the subgroups more susceptible to rebellion, or in need of protection from another tribal confederation or perhaps even that of a nearby sedentary power. The position of leader tended to be a quasi-elected one, as the leader needed to demonstrate not only his competence in warfare but also his capability for fulfilling social obligations toward his followers and subjects. Failure to do so usually meant he would be replaced, forcibly if necessary.

The Scythian Era

Covering the Pontic and Caspian steppes, Scythia stretched roughly from the Dniester River to the Amu Darya River (the ancient Oxus River) and perhaps even to the Altai Mountains (see Map 9.1 for a general map of Central Eurasia), although for Herodotus, our primary source on the Scythians, it comprised an area that extended from the Danube to the Don River.³ As the

2 See Rudi Lindner, "What Was a Nomadic Tribe?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24 (1982): 689–711. Also see David Sneath, *The Headless State: Kinship Society, and Misrepresentation of Nomadic Inner Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

3 Renate Rolle, "The Scythians: Between Mobility, Tomb Architecture, and Early Urban Structures," in Larissa Bonfante (ed.), *The Barbarians of Ancient Europe: Realities and Interactions* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 109.



Map 9.1 Central Eurasia

Scythians did not leave any written sources for much of their history, we are reliant on the accounts from sedentary cultures as well as abundant archaeological evidence from thousands of excavated tombs.⁴ The archaeological data reveal a culture that filled the above boundaries, but it is not certain if it was a single Scythian entity or several groups who shared a common culture that archaeologists have described as Scythian.⁵ Furthermore, it is difficult to pinpoint the ethnic identity although most believe them to have been Iranian who also mingled with proto-Turkic groups that had migrated westward.⁶

The name Scythia is derived from the Greek sources, known as the Saka and Sai respectively in the Persian and Chinese sources. In most instances these terms seem to refer to pastoral nomads who shared a similar culture which consisted of the use of composite bows, the *akinakes* – a straight short sword – artistic motifs of stags and other animals in combat, as well as the widespread use of bronze cauldrons and iron metallurgy. They also shared a

4 Askold I. Ivantchik, "The Funeral of Scythian Kings: The Historical Reality and the Description of Herodotus (4.71–72)," in Bonfante (ed.), *Barbarians of Ancient Europe*, p. 75.

5 David Christian, *A History of Russia, Central Asia and Mongolia* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), pp. 125–28.

6 Ivantchik, "Funeral of Scythian Kings," p. 75.

pastoral nomadic lifestyle with the development of more complex riding harnesses and the creation of deer stones.⁷ Nonetheless, it is not conclusive if the Scythians were an empire or a tribal confederation with the name Scythian being derived from the dominant tribe. From the perspective of most sedentary societies, however, it was difficult to determine the substantial differences between most pastoral nomads, although Herodotus certainly tried. Herodotus identified several groups within Scythia, with the true Scythians being the so-called Royal Scythians.⁸ Although the primary identity of the Scythians was that of swift-moving horse archers and pastoral nomads, the Scythians also ruled a number of sedentary cultures, particularly around the northern rim of the Black Sea, who identified themselves as part of a larger Scythian milieu and not just as tribute-paying subjects.⁹

Yet, the Scythians differed from later pastoral nomads as well. While later nomads would dwell in yurts, the nomadic Scythians dwelt in what might be considered four-wheeled covered wagons.¹⁰ The wagon homes did not preclude the Scythians from more permanent settlements in winter.¹¹ In addition, and perhaps because of their sedentary subjects, the Scythians established hill fortresses (termed *gorodische* by archaeologists), particularly in present-day Ukraine.¹² They were sizable structures for the Bronze Age, with one at Bel'sk near Poltava protected by ramparts extending 34 kilometers and enclosing 4,000 hectares. Furthermore, the *gorodische* served as manufacturing centers for artisans as well as courts for Scythian rulers and trade centers, with Greek merchants coming from colonies on the Pontic coast.¹³

In the 700s, the rise of the Scythians forced the Cimmerians from the Pontic steppes and into the Middle East. The Scythians invaded the Middle East in pursuit of the Cimmerians, which brought the Scythians into a war between the Assyrians and Medes. If Herodotus is correct, the Scythian army remained in the region for twenty-eight years before returning to the steppes. In their wake, the Scythians left a collapsed Assyrian Empire as well as an exhausted Median state. Trade contacts and even warfare may have even extended to Egypt based on archaeological evidence of Scythian arrowheads found there.¹⁴

7 A. I. Melyukova, "The Scythians and Sarmatians," in Denis Sinor (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 99, and Christian, *History of Russia*, p. 127.

8 Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford University Press, 1998), 4.20.

9 Herodotus, *The Histories*, 4.16–17. 10 Herodotus, *The Histories*, 4.46.

11 Herodotus, *The Histories*, 4.46, and Rolle, "The Scythians," p. 112.

12 Rolle, "The Scythians," pp. 124–26. 13 Rolle, "The Scythians," pp. 126–28.

14 Herodotus, *The Histories*, 4.11–12; Rolle, "The Scythians," p. 111; and Melyukova, "Scythians and Sarmatians," p. 101.

Significant socio-political changes occurred after their return to the steppes. In the period between 600 and 400 BCE, the Scythians were largely a tribal society ruled by a king from the Royal Scythians with their primary camp located near the lower Dnieper River.¹⁵ The monarch received tribute of wealth, goods, and servants from the subject tribes but also distributed wealth to his supporters, particularly his *comitatus* or war band.

While the Scythians occasionally raided into the Middle East and other sedentary areas, they were not immune from invasion either. In 530 the founder of the Persian Empire, Cyrus the Great (r. 559–530 BCE), attacked the Massagetae living in Mawarannahr or Transoxiana, in an effort to bring them under his domain, but their queen refused his marriage overtures, defeated his armies, and killed him.¹⁶ King Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) of Persia also attempted to subdue the Scythians. His invasion of Scythia in 513 went through Thrace, targeting the Scythians in the Pontic steppes. Much to his frustration, his invasion failed as the Scythians retreated into the steppes, occasionally sending troops to harass the Persians. Darius famously complained that they would not stand and fight.¹⁷ Eventually, Darius became convinced of the futility of conquering the Scythians and retreated. The Scythians continued to stalk detachments of the Persians, but Darius extracted the majority of his army from the steppes.

During the fourth century, the political environment of Scythia changed significantly. The Scythians asserted their control over the forest groups to the north of the steppe, accessing the fur trade. Political centralization increased so that the Scythian tribes became firmly united under one king, Atheas, as opposed to earlier arrangements of a titular king who worked in conjunction with the leading figures from the other tribes. The increase in wealth from the fur tribute from the forest tribes and the Greek demand for wheat facilitated the greater centralization. As a result, agriculture became an important part of the Scythian economy in the late fifth century.¹⁸ The increase in wealth, which included Greek payments for wheat in gold and silver, often worked as art, increased the sedentarization of the nomads, particularly the aristocracy who served as mediators. To facilitate trade, King Atheas minted coins and established a true city at Kamenskoe Gorodische.

In addition, King Atheas sought to expand his power and influence into the Greek world. With his borders reaching the Danube, he invaded Thrace on several occasions. Atheas' empire-building ceased, however, when he

¹⁵ Melyukova, "Scythians and Sarmatians," p. 104. ¹⁶ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.206–215.

¹⁷ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 4.128–130. ¹⁸ Melyukova, "Scythians and Sarmatians," p. 105.

encountered another rising empire. In 339 BCE, King Philip of Macedon defeated the 90-year-old King Atheas. Although the Scythians lost some of their Danubian territory, they still controlled much of the steppes in the vicinity. As a testament to Atheas' state-building skills, the rest of the Scythian kingdom remained stable after his death.

The region between the Don and Danube rivers became known as Scythia Minor or Lesser Scythia, although Scythian dominance ebbed after invasions by Celts, Getae, and Sarmatians in the second century.¹⁹ By this period the Scythians in the region ceased to exist as an identifiable group, but Scythian primacy remained in Greater Scythia, although much reduced, stretching from the Bug River to the Dnieper River and centered on the Crimean peninsula.²⁰ The grain trade with the Mediterranean world remained a vital part of the economy, thus retaining the kingdom's agricultural base.

While the Scythians were no longer at their height, they possessed military power under King Scilurus in the second century, as demonstrated by his conquest of the Pontic Greek colonies such as Cherson in an effort to remove middle men in the trade. In addition to minting his own coins, Scilurus also built a fleet to challenge Greek control of the Black Sea.²¹ In the face of this threat, the Chersonese and other Greek colonies appealed for aid from Mithradates VI Eupator, the King of Pontus, located on the southeastern shores of the Black Sea. After three expeditions, the Scythians finally relinquished their control of most of Chersonese territory. Cherson remained under Scythian threat until 63 BCE, when a Roman army under Platinus Silvanus defeated the Scythians.²² Further Roman actions reduced the Scythians to a minor threat. Only with the arrival of the Goths in the third century CE did the Scythians cease to exist as an identifiable polity and people, as they mixed into the Gothic population.

Sarmatians

The Sarmatians or Sauromatae appear in the sources in the 500–300s BCE. At least from the time of Herodotus, the Sarmatians coexisted with the

19 Linda Ellis, "Elusive Places: A Chronological Approach to Identity and Territory in Scythia Minor (Second–Seventh Centuries)," in Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (eds.), *Romans, Barbarians, and the Transformation of the Roman World* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), p. 242.

20 Melyukova, "Scythians and Sarmatians," p. 107. Melyukova also refers to this as Little Scythia as well.

21 Melyukova, "Scythians and Sarmatians," p. 107–18.

22 Melyukova, "Scythians and Sarmatians," p. 108.

Scythians, but nomadized to the east of Herodotus' Scythia. Although it is not clear if they were a subset of Scythians, the Sarmatians were an Iranian pastoral nomadic group and spoke an Iranian dialect similar to Scythian.²³ The Sarmatians interacted with the Scythians frequently as the Sarmatians nomadized between the Don and Volga rivers, although by the sixth century some had crossed the Don River and found pastures near the Sea of Azov and may have been subject to Scythian dominion. These interactions tended to be amiable encounters, as evidenced by the Sauromatae joining the Scythians against Darius.²⁴

While the Sarmatians were similar to the Scythians, they had access to less wealth, as seen in the Sarmatian kurgans (burial mounds).²⁵ The range of Sarmatian culture can be easily traced through their kurgans. By the second century CE, cultural artifacts show more homogeneity than in the Scythian period. Social differentiation did occur with a defined aristocracy and the comitatus apparatus, but a well-developed or defined state does not appear.

The initial Sarmatians appear to have been primarily nomadic, but with increased contact and domination over Scythian areas they acquired sedentary populations, and some Sarmatians may have settled down as well. It should be noted, though, that the Sarmatians received less, or were more resistant to, outside cultural influences compared to the Scythians and were more isolated than them at least in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.

As noted previously, there is less gender hierarchy among nomads. The early Sarmatians were even more egalitarian, with some evidence of a matriarchal framework for at least some Sarmatian groups. Among all Sarmatians, women served not only in political and governance roles but also in the military. Indeed, the Massagetae may have been Sarmatian and not Scythian in identity, as they were ruled by a queen. Herodotus attempts to explain the unique situation of the Sarmatians by noting that they originated as the children of Scythian men who lived with the Amazons somewhere in Central Asia.²⁶

By the fourth century, subgroups within the Sarmatians also became identifiable, such as the Alans, Aorsi, Iazyges, and Roxolani. Owing to population increases, pasture limitations, and pressure from eastern nomadic groups, the Sarmatians begin a mass migration across the Don River into the

23 Herodotus, *The Histories*, 4.117.

24 Herodotus, *The Histories*, 4.119, and Melyukova, "Scythians and Sarmatians," p. 111.

25 Melyukova, "Scythians and Sarmatians," p. 111.

26 Herodotus, *The Histories*, 4.110–116, and Peter B. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), p. 50.

Pontic steppes in the 200s, severely disrupting the Scythians, which contributed to their failures against Mithradates. From the Pontic steppes, the Roxolani raided into Crimea and threatened Roman Danubian provinces. Another faction migrated south to the steppes north of the Caucasus Mountains.²⁷ Some of the Sarmatian movements were due to internecine conflict rather than external threats. For instance, in the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains the Aorsi and Siracae fought each other as well as joined opposing sides during the Roman-Pontic War, with the Aorsi siding with Rome. Both were weakened, which allowed the Alans to dominate the Caucasus steppes in 50–60 CE.²⁸

Although the Sarmatians' demise as a major power came by the fourth century CE, their influence did not vanish. The arrival of the Goths in the third century signaled their death knell. While the Sarmatians were incorporated into the larger Goth body, they retained some distinct identity. With the appearance of the Huns in the Pontic steppes in 375 CE, the remaining Sarmatians were absorbed.²⁹ Only the Alans successfully maintained a separate identity by which they became known rather than as Sarmatians. While they often fought allied with and against the Huns, they remained somewhat apart, possibly because they could retreat to the fastness of the Caucasus Mountains. The influence of the Alans remains apparent today, as Ossetians and Kabardians claim them as their ancestors.

Although ethnically, culturally, and linguistically related to the Scythians, Sarmatians differed from the Scythians in military apparatus. The Scythians were primarily horse archers using tri-lobed arrows, often dipped in venom or hemlock so that even light wounds would be deadly. For close combat they used spears and their famous *akinakes* swords, but as they were lightly armored, they typically eschewed close combat and preferred to use archery in combat. The Sarmatians also used light horse archers, but were known to use infantry too. More importantly, even the most undiscerning sedentary opponent could identify the Sarmatians by their use of *cataphractarii* or heavy cavalry. Armed with a lance and dressed from head to toe in armor consisting of metal plates sewn to leather or cloth, the Sarmatians were described as being dressed in dragon scales.³⁰ Armor found in kurgans indicates that only the wealthiest Sarmatians wore metal armor. Less prosperous warriors wore similar armor, but with either bone or leather scales. Owing to their armor,

27 Melyukova, "Scythians and Sarmatians," p. 113.

28 Melyukova, "Scythians and Sarmatians," p. 113.

29 Melyukova, "Scythians and Sarmatians," p. 113.

30 Christian, *History of Russia*, pp. 146–47.

the horses of the Sarmatians also differed from those of the Scythians. By the late Sarmatian period, the horses tended to be larger and increasingly grain fed, possibly reflecting a less pastoral and perhaps semi-agricultural society or control of sedentary populations who provided grain.³¹ Indeed, the Sarmatians influenced the Goths' use of heavy cavalry, which served as the predecessors of heavy cavalry in Europe.

The Xiongnu and Hunnic period

Although Scythian and Sarmatian culture stretched across much of Central Eurasia, in the eastern steppes there arose a distinctly non-Indo-European culture. Several groups dwelled in the Mongolian steppes with very little sustained contact with Chinese civilization until the fifth century BCE.³² There is no indication that any group achieved significant superiority over the others until the fourth century when several pastoral nomadic groups emerged in eastern Central Eurasia. Located in the Ordos Loop of the Huanghe River, the Xiongnu eventually dominated much of the steppe south of the Gobi Desert. The Chinese referred to the nomads in eastern Mongolia as the Donghu or Eastern Barbarians. Both the Xiongnu and the Donghu were Altaic groups – forerunners of the Turks and Mongols.³³ The two other groups, the Yuezhi and the Wusun, who probably both spoke Indo-European languages, lived to the west in the modern Chinese Gansu province and the Gobi Desert beyond (see Map 9.2).

As the Xiongnu had more interaction with the Chinese states to the south and even joined them in their wars, scholars have a better understanding of their history than that of the Yuezhi or Donghu.³⁴ The leader of the Xiongnu ruled the tribal confederation through a royal clan and held the title of *shanyu* (supreme ruler), although leading figures from other clans had the potential to assume the leadership position. By the time the Xiongnu enter the Chinese sources, they were pastoral nomads in the strictest sense but also maintained ties with sedentary cultures, such as Chinese states, as well as with other nomadic groups. Some agriculture also existed among the Xiongnu, although it is not clear if it was conducted by the Xiongnu themselves or by sedentary subjects.

³¹ Melyukova, "Scythians and Sarmatians," pp. 115–16.

³² Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*, p. 128.

³³ Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*, p. 166.

³⁴ Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Qin Dynasty*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 26.



Map 9.2 Xiongnu homeland

Despite the formidable capabilities of the Xiongnu military, in 214 BCE the armies of Shi Huangdi of the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BCE) defeated them and drove them north of the Huanghe River, shattering Xiongnu supremacy in the southern steppes.³⁵ Although the practice of building defensive walls existed during the Zhou era (1046–256 BCE), Shi Huangdi promoted the fortification of the Ordos Loop not only as a defensive measure against the return of the Xiongnu but also to claim territory, demarcating a clear sedentary zone.³⁶ Complete Xiongnu collapse, however, was staved off by Shi Huangdi's death in 210 and the subsequent demise of the Qin Dynasty.

After the Xiongnu returned to the Ordos Loop, they reached their peak under Maodun. During the period of weakness between 214 and 210,

³⁵ Sima Qian, *Qin Dynasty*, p. 79.

³⁶ Sima Qian, *Qin Dynasty*, p. 53; Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 133; and Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*, pp. 155–58.

Maodun's father and the *shanyu* of the Xiongnu sent his son as a hostage to the Yuezhi, intending to make another son his successor. Maodun stayed with the Yuezhi for four years before escaping back to the Ordos during the chaos of a Xiongnu attack on the Yuezhi.³⁷ His humiliation as a hostage motivated Maodun never to allow a similar situation to arise. He swiftly rose to power by developing a highly disciplined bodyguard, which he used to usurp the throne by assassinating his father.³⁸ With a young and inexperienced ruler leading the Xiongnu, the Donghu sought to take advantage of the situation but met defeat when they encroached on Xiongnu pastures in the Gobi Desert region – a traditional dividing line between the steppes.

With the threat of the Donghu nullified, Maodun took his revenge on the Yuezhi and drove them from former Xiongnu territories west of the Ordos.³⁹ With the southern steppes under Xiongnu control, Maodun then expanded north to dominate all of present-day Mongolia and extended his influence into southern Siberia. His expansion north of the Gobi allowed Maodun to access both the gold mines of the Altai and the Siberian fur trade (see Map 9.3).

All of this was possible for three reasons. The first was that Maodun created a highly disciplined army that gave him a considerable advantage over all of his opponents. Secondly, it took several years for China to stabilize after the Qin collapse in 210 BCE. Finally, with his enemies subdued and his southern border secure due to the absence of a powerful Chinese state, Maodun used his wealth to stabilize his control of the nomads. Once he had conquered all of the nomads, however, he could no longer exploit them in order to sate the demands of his followers. In need of additional wealth, he turned his gaze to China. The Xiongnu had no desire to rule China, but raided it in order to extract wealth as well as to offer a release for his followers who, if left to their own devices, might attempt to break away from Maodun's control.

In 206 BCE, however, the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE) stabilized China. In his initial years, Emperor Gaozu could do little but attempt to fend off Xiongnu raids. By 201, with his control over China secure, Emperor Gaozu responded to the raids by invading the steppes. As would be a trend for most of Chinese history, advancing into the steppes against the nomads ended in disaster. The Xiongnu simply retreated, luring the Han deeper into the steppes and extending their lines of communications and supplies. A third of the Han army died from exposure alone. The Xiongnu constantly harassed

37 Sima Qian, *Han Dynasty II*, p. 134, and Christian, *History of Russia*, p. 184.

38 Sima Qian, *Han Dynasty II*, p. 134.

39 Sima Qian, *Han Dynasty II*, pp. 135–36, and Christian, *History of Russia*, p. 185.



Map 9.3 Xiongnu at their height

the Han but never engaged in a full battle until the Han reached their breaking point. Gaozu eventually found his camp besieged. He could neither go forward nor retreat without risking destruction. Thus in 198, Gaozu began negotiations with what became known as the *Heqin* treaties.⁴⁰ The result of these treaties was that the Han agreed to send regular gifts of wine, silk, grain, and other goods to the Xiongnu. In addition, a royal princess was sent as the *shanyu*'s bride. The Han also recognized that the territory north of the Han northern defenses was that of the Xiongnu, and the Han would not encroach on it. In return, Xiongnu would not attack. This peace treaty lasted sixty years.

Although the *Heqin* treaties appeared as a protection racket, it was much more complex. From the *shanyu*'s perspective, it provided a largesse to assist his followers, which provided him leverage over otherwise independent-minded

40 Sima Qian, *Han Dynasty II*, pp. 138–39; Christian, *History of Russia*, p. 186; and Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, p. 61.

tribal chieftains and prevented their raids on China and internal feuds. The Han also benefited as it promoted trade. Although it is uncertain if this trade with the central government was greater in value than the goods sent to the Xiongnu, the border trading posts prospered. In the long term, the Han believed they would achieve the upper hand, as the lack of raiding would sap the Xiongnu's martial abilities. Another tactic was the use of a royal princess. Marriage to a royal princess gave immense prestige to the Xiongnu nobility. As the princess also arrived with a retinue, the Han also saw this diplomatic tool as a way to sinicize the Xiongnu by introducing Han culture and practices to them and thus "civilize" the Xiongnu. While it may have been somewhat successful in terms of the Xiongnu becoming more adept at diplomacy with the Han, it is difficult to determine whether it was the influence of the princesses and their entourages or simply more contact with the Han government that did it. In either case, rampant sinicization did not occur on the levels that the Han envisioned. Nonetheless, these trade arrangements were cheaper than war, particularly the logistics involved in invading the steppe.⁴¹

With the Han neutralized, Maodun then turned his attention to the Yuezhi and launched a series of campaigns, led by his son Jizhu, in 175. The Xiongnu victories in 162, after Maodun's death, over the Yuezhi split them into two groups and gained the Shanyu Jizhu modern Gansu as well as most of the oasis cities of Xinjiang.⁴² The Large Yuezhi fled to the Ili Valley where they were absorbed by the Wusun, Xiongnu allies, who nomadized in the Ili Valley or fled to join kinsmen in the south. The Small Yuezhi fled into Mawarannahr or Transoxiana where they eventually became known as the Tokharians, an ethnonym derived from one the Yuezhi clans, who later formed the Kushan Empire.⁴³ With these conquests, the Xiongnu Empire now added non-Altaic nomads and large numbers of sedentary populations. For the most part, as long as they paid tribute, provided troops, and recognized the *shanyu* as their ruler, they were left to their own devices.

In addition to the merchants and agriculturalists in Xinjiang, the Xiongnu also ruled over agriculturalists in Mongolia. It is not clear exactly who these people were, but they grew millet, barley, and wheat as well as constructed workshops. Maodun clearly developed a strategy for these agriculturalists, as

41 Sima Qian, *Han Dynasty II*, p. 143.

42 Christian, *History of Russia*, p. 187; Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, p. 51; and Craig G. R. Benjamin, *The Yuezhi: Origin, Migration and the Conquest of Northern Bactria* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 62 and 72.

43 Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, p. 51.

the ones in the Orkhon Valley were located near his winter camp. In addition, other settlements existed, such as the one near Ivolga (modern Ulan Ude), in which some houses had heating ducts under the floors. Although the Xiongnu settlements were not on the same scale as those of the Scythians, it appears that the Xiongnu understood that sedentary cultures had their benefits and could make them less dependent on the Han. This is further evinced by the fact that the Xiongnu collected tribute and traded not only with the Han but also with sedentary cultures in Siberia, the Ferghana Valley, and Xinjiang, thus providing them with a wide variety of goods and even foods such as grapes. This allowed them to also serve as the major intermediaries and protection for trade between the Han and other regions.

Xiongnu military supremacy allowed them to maintain hegemony over such a far-flung empire rather than a well-structured bureaucracy. The Xiongnu fought largely as horse archers, but wore armor. The Xiongnu were actually more technologically advanced than their nomadic rivals or even the Han cavalry in that they used stirrups, which provided the Xiongnu with two major advantages. The first was that it is much easier to mount a horse with stirrups than without. The second is that it made archery more accurate. The traditional method of riding in Mongolia has been by almost standing in the saddle and using the legs as shock absorbers. In doing so and by timing the shot when the horse's hooves are off the ground, the archer was able to shoot much more accurately and with a more powerful bow than one who just sat on a horse, as the archer uses more muscle groups while standing. In addition, Xiongnu used not only bone and bronze weapons and tools but also iron materials, which gave them an edge over many other nomads and Siberian groups while keeping them on par with the Han.

With their control of trade and military supremacy, the Xiongnu constituted a threat that the Han Empire could not abide. During the reign of the Han Emperor Wudi, the *Hegün* tribute system deteriorated. For the Han, the demands became too onerous not only in terms of material goods but, more importantly, in terms of shame for the state. Wudi planned military offensives against the Xiongnu but realized that the Han army alone could not defeat the Xiongnu. Thus in 138, he sent an envoy named Zhang Qian west in an attempt to forge an alliance with the Yuezhi, now resettled along the northern banks of the Amu Darya, which failed. He also sought to improve the stock of the Han cavalry by acquiring the legendary blood-sweating heavenly horses.⁴⁴ This desire for horses also reflects the problems the Han

44 Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, p. 61.

faced with the *Heqin* treaties. As China lacks the mineral selenium in its soil, a necessary mineral for the proper raising of horses, the Han were dependent on outside sources for large numbers of horses. The Xiongnu and other nearby nomads traditionally supplied them through trade. However, with the *Heqin* treaties and Xiongnu dominance, they could dictate the terms of trade and the quality of the horses that went to China. Without good mounts, the Han army had little chance of success against the nomads.

While Zhang Qian was away, Wudi ultimately decided to launch an offensive, against the advice of his advisors. The cost was great as they planned for a one-hundred-day campaign. Previous campaigns failed as the Han tried to crush the Xiongnu in one blow. By switching to a gradual plan, the Han found success.⁴⁵ The Han forced the Xiongnu north of the Gobi in 127 through a sustained effort and then occupied the Gobi. With more walls and irrigation works, the Han occupation of the Ordos found success with the Huanghe as a definable border. Taking advantage of their victories, the Han also established a presence north of the Huanghe River and gained control of the Gansu corridor when the local Xiongnu submitted after repeated attacks by Han armies. As with the Ordos Loop, the Han secured the region with settlers and military colonists reaching Dunhuang by 104 BCE. Yet, despite two Han victories north of the Gobi in 119 BCE, Wudi could not crush them. With these events, southern Mongolia (south of the Gobi) became a neutral zone of sorts occupied by pastoral nomads who turned to the Han for aid against Xiongnu aggression. This threat declined as the defeats fractured the Xiongnu into western and eastern divisions, but it remained a threat. Indeed, Han control of their far western territories was dependent on the cooperation of other nomads. With Wusun aid, the Han could control modern Xinjiang, as they did in 71 BCE, but when the Wusun joined the Xiongnu after 23 CE, the Han lost control.

Nonetheless, Xiongnu declined in the face of Han expansion, as these losses stripped the Xiongnu of not only territory but also tribute, from both the Han and nomadic groups and the oasis towns that were formerly Xiongnu subjects. Furthermore, the Xiongnu saw fractures within their own ranks. By 54 CE clear divisions arose among the Xiongnu based on proximity to Han influence. The southern Xiongnu turned to Han patronage against their northern brethren and submitted to the Han emperor.

Thomas Barfield describes this as the Inner Frontier Strategy in which one steppe group moves closer to China and looks for protection and in return

45 Christian, *History of Russia*, p. 196, and Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, pp. 62–63.

sends hostages and tribute (horses).⁴⁶ The Inner Frontier Strategy was employed most frequently, and was necessary, when a state of civil war occurred in the steppes. Chinese empires utilized it as an effective way of controlling the steppes as well as creating a buffer zone that allowed them to play one nomad against the other. The nomads, however, were not passive actors in this strategy, no matter how the Chinese viewed their own machinations. For the nomads, the Inner Frontier Strategy provided them with time, protection, and resources to regroup against their rivals. This benefited the southern Xiongnu in additional ways as well as the southern Shanyu Huhanye, who became one of the most powerful individuals in the Han Empire – just below the emperor.

The northern Xiongnu, led by Shanyu Zhizhi, tried to also find similar accommodation with the Han, but the Han declined their offer of submission. With the southern Xiongnu in their sphere of influence, the Han rightly saw no benefit and only added expenses. In 45 CE the northern Xiongnu killed a Chinese envoy, which led to war. With their southern Xiongnu allies, the Han successfully advanced north, defeating the northern *shanyu*. He fled west and invaded Sogdia. Sogdia then appealed to the Han for assistance, to which the Han complied and sent troops who defeated and killed Zhizhi.

The southern Xiongnu now controlled Mongolia. The *shanyu*'s wife, Wang Zhaojun, a Han princess, assisted relations with the Han by establishing tribute missions and preventing war. Furthermore, with turmoil in the Han Empire, the Shanyu Huhanye successfully restored the Xiongnu Empire to its former height.⁴⁷ After his death famine and civil war returned, causing the Xiongnu to fragment. Although the Xiongnu continued to exist, they lacked the power to control the entire steppe.⁴⁸

The Huns

Before long another confederation arose from the former vassals of the Xiongnu, which resulted in the westward exodus of the Xiongnu. As they moved across the steppe, their identity changed. Scholars do not know exactly what occurred, but the Xiongnu merged with other disparate pastoral nomads

46 Thomas Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China, 221 BC to AD 1757* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1992), pp. 63–64.

47 Christian, *History of Russia*, p. 202.

48 Barfield, *Perilous Frontier*, pp. 100–105, and David B. Honey, *The Rise of the Medieval Hsiung-nu: The Biography of Liu-Yüan* (Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1990), p. 6.

and formed a new confederation known as the Huns, although this may have been what the Xiongnu called themselves.⁴⁹ The Huns were an amalgamation of Altaic (both proto-Turkic and proto-Mongolian) and Indo-European nomads. The cultural affinity with the Xiongnu is clear, as archaeological evidence shows a connection with Xiongnu culture found in Mongolia and Inner Mongolia. The Huns reached the Aral Sea by 160 CE but remained on the steppe between the Ural River and the Ili Valley for over a century. Not until the fourth century did the Huns begin a massive migration that propelled them into Central and South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.

By 50 CE, the Yuezhi in Central Asia had transformed Sogdia and Bactria first by destroying the Greco-Bactrian kingdoms when they fled from the Xiongnu and the Wusun and then establishing the Tokharian Empire, and finally transforming into the Kushan Empire that eventually included parts of Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and much of northern India. The empire collapsed by the end of the third century, leaving the region without a powerful central authority. To the west the Sassanian Empire arose and nibbled at the fringes of the former Kushan Empire. A larger and more devastating threat, however, emerged in 350 when one branch of the Huns, known as the Chionites in Latin sources, invaded and conquered Sogdia and raided the Sassanian borders. By 400 CE, Bactria and part of northern India fell to them as well. Here the Huns stabilized and became known to us as the Kidarites or Kidara, named after their leader Kidar.⁵⁰

This dynasty was short-lived, as it fell to a new wave of pastoral nomads known as the Hephthal, and in some sources as the Hephthalites or White Huns.⁵¹ The origins of their name, particularly the color aspect, remain a mystery. Controlling Sogdia, Bactria, as well as much of modern Xinjiang, the elites gradually became semi-nomadic, holding court at fixed locations, and moving to the hills and mountains to escape the heat, while the majority of the Hephthalites remained nomadic. From their position in Central Asia, the Hephthalites raided Gupta India as well as Sassanid territory. Although conflicts on the Sassanid border were frequent, the Sassanids saw value in hiring them as mercenaries as well as giving them refuge during power struggles. Ultimately, however, the Sassanids defeated the Hephthalites in the 560s by allying with another steppe power – the Turks.⁵²

49 John R. Gardiner-Garden, *Apollodoros of Artemita and the Central Asian Skythians* (Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1987), p. 27.

50 Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, pp. 54–56 and 80.

51 Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, pp. 56 and 81. 52 Christian, *History of Russia*, p. 220.

While the Huns were active in Central Asia, another branch crossed the Volga River in 360 and then proceeded to conquer and incorporate the Alans and the rest of the Sarmatian groups. Their migrations caused the Goths in the Pontic steppes to migrate toward the Roman Empire. Hunnic attacks became more frequent, and by 375, augmented by the Alans and other Iranian nomads, the Huns dominated both the Pontic and Caspian steppes.

From the Pontic steppes, the Huns menaced three empires. By marching through the Caucasus Mountains, the Huns attacked the Sassanians. Their ties to the Chionites are confirmed by the fact that the attacks appear to reveal some coordination between the two groups. The Eastern Roman Empire determined that they made useful mercenaries, particularly to counter the Sassanid horse archers. Yet this employment opportunity did not exempt the East Roman Empire from attacks either.⁵³ Under King Rua, the Huns raided the Balkans and even attacked Constantinople. Under this onslaught, the Eastern Roman Empire provided the Huns with a subsidy (or tribute) of 700 lb of gold and opened frontier markets for them. While this staved off most of the attacks, the Huns extended their rule to the Baltic Sea and moved into the Alföld Plain of modern Hungary in 433.

Rua's death in 433–432 did not significantly change the status quo. The Byzantines still paid an annual tribute of approximately 700 lb of gold and permitted border markets in order to forestall raids. Owing to this largess, Rua's nephews and successors, Bleda and Attila, successfully maintained control of the Hunnic Empire. The two consolidated their power and invaded the Byzantine Empire only when its attentions were directed elsewhere.

With the success also came rivalry. Attila established himself as the undisputed ruler of the Huns in 445 through fratricide. Despite this, Attila's reign was not secure. Sources indicate that he remained very concerned about the fugitives to whom the Byzantines gave amnesty and that he needed an immense amount of tribute and plunder to keep his subordinates in line.⁵⁴ If the Byzantines did not sate his demands, Attila invaded. After an invasion of the Balkans in 447, Emperor Theodosius II agreed to pay 2,100 lb of gold as well as 6,000 lb of gold in overdue payments. While it was an enormous sum, payments such as this were a small portion (2%) of the Byzantine budget.

While the Huns continued to extort wealth from the Byzantines, Attila found less success in the Western Roman Empire because of its increasingly decentralized authority. In 451, Attila led a vast army of Huns and allied

53 Noel Lenski, "Captivity and Romano-Barbarian Interchange," in Mathisen and Shanzer (eds.), *Romans, Barbarians*, p. 187.

54 E. A. Thompson, *The Huns* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), pp. 96–100.

groups into Gaul against the Visigoths. At Troyes, Attila found not just the Visigoths but also the Roman army led by Aetius, who had spent considerable time among the Huns. Aetius defeated Attila and forced him to withdraw. The Huns continued to seek conquest and plunder in the Western Roman Empire and invaded Italy in 452. After sacking northern Italy, Attila descended upon Rome. Although legend states that Pope Leo the Great persuaded Attila not to sack Rome, in reality Attila had received word of plague in the vicinity, and in addition the Byzantines threatened Attila's lines of communication. Furthermore, Attila's campaigns were not about conquest, but plunder and convincing the Romans (both east and west) that only regular tribute prevented such raids.

The invasion of Italy was Attila's last great invasion, however, as he died of a hemorrhage on his wedding night in 453. Although the Huns maintained their empire for a few more years, it slowly unraveled without Attila's leadership. The empire depended on Attila's charisma and determination. He had not created any significant structures to hold the empire together after his death. His sons attempted to continue the empire, but without the continual flow of tribute and plunder they found it difficult to hold the confederation together, and the Byzantines decisively defeated them in 466. After this most Huns migrated back to the Pontic steppes where they gradually became absorbed by other groups, although a few bands remained along the Danube in present-day Hungary.

Post Xiongnu world in the east

In the wake of the Xiongnu collapse, the Xianbei confederation filled the power vacuum in the eastern steppes. The Xianbei had been part of the Donghu confederation, joining the Xiongnu after Maodun's victory over the Donghu. During periods of Xiongnu weakness, the Han allied with Xianbei leaders to harass the Xiongnu and also traded with them as part of the practice of using "barbarians to kill other barbarians."⁵⁵

Although the Manchurian Xianbei replaced the Xiongnu as the major power in northern Mongolia after 89 CE, they were incapable of retaining the same level of central control that the Xiongnu did. The Xiongnu still existed in the southern steppes, occasionally joining the Xianbei in raids. The Han Empire's own policy of using barbarians against barbarians actually accelerated the decentralization of the steppes, creating instability on their

⁵⁵ Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, p. 69.

own border. With the destruction of a strong Xiongnu state, the Xianbei no longer had a target for their raids. Thus, the Xianbei turned their attention to the south and raided China.

Under the leadership of their khaghan, Tan Shihuai, the Xianbei carried out annual attacks on China and created a khaghanate that stretched from Manchuria to Zungharia. The use of the term *khaghan* (a ruler of imperial rank) first appears with the Xianbei.⁵⁶ The lack of centralized rule, however, meant that the empire was strictly a construct of his charisma and military success. With his death in 180, the Xianbei Empire fragmented into a number of petty polities throughout the eastern steppes, many of which became involved in the civil wars of the later Han period where the Xianbei served as valued mercenaries.

Although the Xianbei remained nomads on the steppe, a number of Chinese dynasties emerged from Xianbei warlords along the border. Manchurian groups could be nomadic, but they also contained many semi-nomadic elements and often their tribes contained sedentary forest populations. Because of their more intimate familiarity with sedentary populations, the Xianbei successfully ruled sedentary regions even as their nomadic armies allowed them to conquer territory in China. One such example was that of Murong Hui (283–333) who first did this in Manchuria. His realm exported grain to China and also produced silk for commerce.⁵⁷ His successor, Murong Huang, expanded into China, conquering the Chao kingdom, which had Xiongnu roots, and established the Yen Dynasty. The Yen remained a viable state until 370, when the rulers became too rapacious and caused an economic collapse. Other nomadic groups, such as the Toba or Tabghach, followed a similar route, establishing the Wei Dynasty (386–534), and attempted to straddle a dual kingdom of pastoralists and sedentary agriculturalists.

As the Xianbei and Toba became more focused in Manchuria and northern China, the Ruruan emerged in Mongolia. Their background remains murky, as scholars are unsure if they were of Turkic, Mongolian, or Tungusic origin, although it appears that they were at one point part of the Donghu confederation. Nonetheless, the Ruruan remained a potent force on the steppe and became the Wei Dynasty's most feared opponent. By 394, under the leadership of Shelun Khaghan, the Ruruan coalesced into a formidable power and ruled over a vast territory. Some of his success was due to Wei policy of manipulating nomads near their borders, which left those pastoral nomads

56 Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, p. 71. 57 Barfield, *Perilous Frontier*, pp. 105–109.

weak; the Ruruan, being farther away from Wei influence, dominated these groups as some nomads sought to escape Toba suzerainty. Furthermore, the Ruruan dominated much of Inner Asia in the same manner as the Xianbei and Xiongnu before them, with their dominion reaching into modern Xinjiang, Siberia, and to the borders of Korea.

By the 490s, the Toba's military capabilities had declined, partly because of the increasing sinicization among the elites, which allowed the Ruruan to continue as a power as they recovered from every setback. The sinicization of the Toba-Wei Dynasty caused a rift between the government and the nomads, who felt increasingly disenfranchised. In spite of their fractured society, the Wei still retained enough prestige, as the last Ruruan khaghan, Anagui (r. 520–552), sought an alliance with the Wei. The alliance was short-lived as the Wei collapsed, forming Eastern Wei and Western Wei dynasties, which allowed the Ruruan to assert their authority over the nomadic dependencies of the Wei. The Eastern Wei continued the alliance and paid tribute to Anagui. In fear of the shift in power, the Western Wei secured an alliance with Bumin, the leader of the Turks, a vassal of the Ruruan. The Turks remained loyal to the Ruruan, however, by crushing an invasion from the west against the Ruruan by nomads in 551. It appears that the Turks may have played a significant role in the victory, as the Turks began to assert themselves more and Bumin demanded a royal bride from the Ruruan. When Anagui refused, Bumin successfully requested a princess from the Wei. Then in 552, the Turks defeated the Ruruan, causing Anagui to commit suicide. Over the next few years, the Turks secured their position in Mongolia. Although many of the Ruruan eventually accepted Turk rule, a significant number fled westward and had a notable impact on events in Western Eurasia.

Rise of the Turks

Although Bumin Khaghan led the Turks to success against the Ruruan, his life ended in the midst of destroying the Ruruan. Mughan Khaghan (552–575), Bumin's younger son, came to the throne. Basing their power in the Orkhon River valley of Mongolia, the Turks were heterogeneous ethnically and linguistically, although language became a key identity marker for the Turks. Under Mughan's leadership, the Turks conquered many of the states that bordered China as well as expanding into Siberia, Manchuria, and Central Asia, which brought the Kirgiz, Khitans, and Hephthalites respectively under their control. Mughan's uncle, Ishtemi, carried out the conquest of the

western steppes, propelling the remnants of the Ruruan and other nomads to form the Avar confederation in Western Eurasia. The Kök Turk (Blue Turk or Heavenly Turk) Khaghanate now stretched from Manchuria to the Black Sea and perhaps further west, making it the largest steppe empire in history at this point in 568.⁵⁸

To ease the governance of the empire, it divided into two wings roughly around the Altai Mountains and Lake Balkhash.⁵⁹ They dominated much of the Silk Roads trade, and the revenue from it helped maintain the empire. Although the Turks had allied with the Sassanids against the Hephthalites, the Sassanids rebuked their trade overtures. The Byzantines, however, were interested in new trade routes through the steppes as the Sassanids blocked most trade coming from the southern Silk Roads. Furthermore, the Byzantines sought potential allies against the Sassanids as well as the Avars.⁶⁰ In the east, the Turks had very close and, at times, dominating relations with various Chinese dynasties between the Han and Sui periods, during the reigns of Mughan and his successor and young brother Taspār. This changed some during the Sui period (581–617) when the Sui effectively challenged Turk military supremacy in northwestern China.

Although Ishtemi ruled the western portion of the Turk Khaghanate as the Yabghu Khaghan or junior khan, it was not independent as the eastern half of the empire remained the political center. This model of dual-governance influenced numerous steppe states throughout history, including the Karakhanids and the Mongol Empire. The risk, which affected virtually all steppe empires, was that it could lead to independent appanages, which is what occurred with Ishtemi's successor and son, Tardu (567–603), who also then attempted to usurp the eastern half's traditional supremacy.⁶¹ The eastern portion of the empire never recovered from Tardu's actions and remained in a truncated form until 630 when it fragmented for good.

The western portion of the empire continued on after Tardu's death. Tun Yabghu Khaghan (618–630) and Heraclius of the Byzantine Empire pragmatically renewed their alliance against the Sassanids. Tun Yabghu also established a capital at Talas in Central Asia and maintained cordial relations with the Tang Empire in China. Although his reign was a high point, many nomadic leaders viewed his rule as favoring his sedentary subjects and not the nomads. Several revolts erupted and led to his assassination in 630. His

58 Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, p. 128. 59 Barfield, *Perilous Frontier*, p. 132.

60 Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, pp. 130–31.

61 Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, p. 131.

successors could not reestablish control and the Turkic empire collapsed into a number of tribal confederations.⁶²

In the east, the Turkic decline was brief. Under the leadership of Kutlugh Khan (682–691), the Turks returned to dominance as the Second Turkic Khaghanate. Dissatisfied with living under Tang dominance, he and his sons spent most of their time establishing their dominance over other Turkic tribes in Mongolia as well as non-Turkic tribes in Siberia and Manchuria. The establishment of the khaghanate was completed under Kutlugh Khaghan's successor, Qapaghan Khaghan (691–716), who stabilized the empire after its rapid growth.

Unlike the previous empires, this khaghanate left extensive records from the Turkic perspective on monuments throughout Mongolia, written in a runic script. While the various Khaghans provided much-needed leadership, a large amount of their success also came from the brilliance of Tonyukuk, a Chinese-educated Turk who first entered the service of Kutlugh Khaghan. He advocated the return to the steppe, arguing that the previous Turkic states had declined because they sinicized, and urged the Turks to maintain their culture and identity at all costs.

He recommended the Turks remain independent of the Chinese – both geographically and culturally. Tonyukuk objected to the building of a capital city as this provided a target for the Tang. He also argued that Buddhism and Daoism undermined their martial skills.⁶³ Tonyukuk did not advise isolation, but maintained they should follow the tradition of extracting benefits from China through trade, and raid if necessary. Tonyukuk believed that they could then hold the confederation together through the distribution of luxury goods to leaders. This had been standard practice on the steppes, but leaders too often had been seduced by the wealth of China and placed themselves in a more subservient role.

Many of Tonyukuk's warnings were directed to Bilge Khaghan (716–734), who found the symbols and luxury of Chinese imperial legitimacy attractive. Ultimately, Tonyukuk's wisdom prevailed, as he argued that the Turks' strength was their mobility. Bilge Khaghan learned this fact quickly as he quelled numerous rebellions among his nomadic vassals. Aided by his uncle, Kul Tegin, Bilge Khaghan emerged as perhaps the most successful khaghan, expanding the empire to the Syr Darya and almost to Tibet. Unfortunately, the empire unraveled not long after the death of Kul Tegin in 731. With

62. Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, pp. 135–36.

63. Christian, *History of Russia*, p. 262, and Barfield, *Perilous Frontier*, p. 148.

Bilge's death in 734, his sons failed to hold the state together, and they were overwhelmed by truculent vassal tribes in alliance with the Tang.⁶⁴

Ramifications of the Turks

After the demise of the Hunnic Empire, the Byzantines were able to expand their influence in the steppes. The Danube was once again their frontier, often protected by nomads hired as mercenaries. At the same time, the Byzantines viewed the nomads as neighbors and sometimes refugees, yet still realizing that they could be a threat.⁶⁵ During the reign of Emperor Justin II (r. 565–578), the Byzantines also established trade ties through the Crimean with local powers such as the Turkic Onoghurs, who controlled the Ural trade routes in the wake of Hunnic collapse.

The rise of the Turks upset this balance. As the Kök Turks expanded into the Caspian steppes, others were forced westwards into the Pontic steppes, among them Oghur Turks, a group different from the Oghuz Turks who settled in the Caspian steppes.⁶⁶ The two most well known among these groups in Western Eurasia were the Kutrighur and Utrighur. Although identical in terms of culture, language, and Turkic identity, the Kutrighur and Utrighur engaged in frequent warfare. While both moved to the Pontic steppes, due to the strife over pastures and other issues, the Kutrighur relocated to the Danube area. Generally speaking, neither groups caused the Byzantines too much concern. However, after the Kutrighurs pillaged the Balkan provinces on several occasions, Emperor Justinian (527–565) formed an alliance with the Utrighurs. Afterwards, the Kutrighurs sought the favor of the Byzantines. This arrangement allowed the Byzantines to manipulate Kutrighurs and Utrighurs to their profit.⁶⁷ This system worked well until 557 when the Avars arrived and incorporated the Kutrighurs and Utrighurs into their polity.

The Avars

After the rise of the Turks in Mongolia, many Ruruan groups fled westward to stay ahead of the Oghuz Turk expansion, but also defeated other groups to

64 Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, p. 138.

65 Ekaterina Nechaeva, "The 'Runaway' Avars and Late Antique Diplomacy," in Mathisen and Shanzer (eds.), *Romans, Barbarians*, p. 176.

66 For more on the origins of the Oghur Turks, see Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, pp. 95–106.

67 Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, p. 101.

augment their numbers. The Avars, as they became known, never accumulated enough power to successfully challenge the Kök Turks. As the Avars entered the Pontic and Danubian steppes, nomads who did not find refuge in the Byzantine Empire came under their dominion. By this point, the Avars could no longer be considered the Ruruan but a confederation comprised of numerous Turkic and other Altaic groups along with Iranian and Germanic steppe groups.⁶⁸

In 558, they sent an embassy to the Byzantines and caused quite a stir with the way they plaited their long hair on both sides of their head, which fashionable Byzantines adopted.⁶⁹ Additionally, the Avars brought new military technology into the region – the stirrup and the saber. From the Byzantines, the Avars demanded the usual types of gifts as well as fertile land. Although a treaty was made, the Avars received only gifts and not land. The Byzantines desired them as an ally to control the steppes yet also threaten the Sassanid Empire through the Caucasus passes.

Relations with the Byzantines soured as the Avars formed new alliances and operated in conjunction with the Lombards in Central Europe in 568. Eventually, even the Lombards feared the Avars and migrated to northern Italy. One factor in the decline of cordial relations between the Avars and the Byzantines was the appearance of the Turks in Western Eurasia. In 568, the Turkic yabghu Tardu (referred to as Tourxanthos in the Greek sources) contacted Emperor Justin II and referred to the Avars as runaway slaves, thus delegitimizing Avar claims to the title of khaghan.⁷⁰

With the arrival of the Turks, the Avars pressed into Central Europe and settled in the Alfold Plain. Under the leadership of Bayan, the Avars reached their apogee and began raiding the Byzantines' Balkan possessions.⁷¹ The Byzantines resorted to Barfield's Outer Frontier Strategy: paying them 80,000 gold pieces and to be allies, although the Byzantines viewed the Avars as subordinate due to their status as fugitives from the Turks and the gold was simply a gift, not tribute.⁷² The Avars proved to be unreliable allies as they allowed their Slavic subjects to raid and settle in Byzantine lands.⁷³

68 Samuel Szadeczký-Kardoss, "The Avars," in Sinor (ed.), *Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, pp. 206–207, and Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, pp. 109–10.

69 Christian, *History of Russia*, p. 280, and Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, p. III.

70 Nechaeva, "The 'Runaway' Avars," p. 176–77.

71 Golden, *History of the Turkic Peoples*, p. III.

72 Barfield, *Perilous Frontier*; Nechaeva, "The 'Runaway' Avars," p. 179, and Szadeczký-Kardoss, "The Avars," pp. 207–208.

73 Lenski, "Captivity and Romano-Barbarian Interchange," p. 187.

The Avars remained a significant power until 623 when their influence began to decline. By the 620s, more Avars became sedentary. This weakened them militarily as they lost control of Central Europe when the Wends revolted. Yet even after this setback, their decline was not immediately apparent until after 626 when their Constantinople in league with the Sassanids failed. The military loss was sufficiently grave that the Avars lost not only substantial military resources but also prestige. Their downward spiral continued as they lost their dominance over the Slavs in the Balkans. Emperor Heraclius (610–641) then launched an offensive in the Balkans, aligning the Byzantine Empire with the Turks against the Avars. After this, the Avars remained a threat, but not on such a grand scale. They raided to the east and west, but in the end their power was forever shattered when Charlemagne's forces defeated them in an eight-year war (788–796), forcing them to submit to Frankish authority.

Khazars

The Khazars began as the western-most province of the Kōk Turks and dominated the Caucasus steppes while also becoming the most powerful Jewish state until the rise of Israel in the twentieth century. Situated between the Black and Caspian seas, Khazaria served as the primary intermediary between the Turks and the Byzantines. As part of the western Turk empire, they began raiding south of Derbend in 627, just after the Byzantines had fended off the Avars. By 628, the Khazars brought much of Transcaucasia under their sway. With the resources procured from Transcaucasia combined with their northern pastures and increasing control of the Pontic steppes along with their trade with the Byzantines, the reason that the Khazars weathered disorder and even emerged as a powerful kingdom as the rest of the Turkic empire collapsed is clear.

The rise of Islam, however, paused Khazar expansion. The Arab irruption into the Middle East threw the region into confusion. The Sassanid Empire collapsed before them, and the Byzantine Empire, exhausted by virtually a century of war with the Sassanids, lost Syria and Egypt. Soon the Khazars were neighbors with the dynamic Islamic Umayyad Empire. Hostilities quickly rose between the two states with attacks launched by both sides. Neither side gained much initially, although Khazar troops reached Mosul after destroying an entire Umayyad army in 730. An Arab army, however, under the future Caliph Marwan II (744–750), led a massive army into the heart of Khazaria, bypassing their fortifications, and sacked the Khazar capital

of Itil. They pursued the khaghan up the Volga and forced him to convert to Islam. Umayyad domination was elusive, however, as they could not control the steppe with tenuous lines of communication. Almost immediately, the khaghan recanted his conversion.⁷⁴

By the time the Umayyad Empire collapsed during the Abbasid Revolution in 750, the Khazars had not only reestablished their strength but extended their power from Khorezm on the Aral Sea, dominating the Pontic steppe. Their southern border with the Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258) was secured when the second Caliph, al-Mansur, arranged a marriage alliance between one of his governors and a Khazar princess.

With no major threats and secure trade routes, Khazaria flourished. The Khazars encouraged sedentary Slavic settlers to establish towns and farms so they could benefit from them as well while maintaining their military supremacy, which allowed them to control and extract tribute from the Bulgars and the Rus' to the North. Gradually, however, their commercial activities became more important, particularly in dealing with the Byzantines. They gained Crimea from the Byzantines by denying them wheat and other goods.

While the Byzantines lost Crimea, they attempted to influence the Khazars through the spread of Christianity in Khazaria. The Khazar elite, however, went in a different direction and converted to Judaism in 837–838.⁷⁵ For decades they had extensive contact with Jewish merchants. Some had converted not long after Marwan's invasion in the eighth century, perhaps as a rejection of Islam. The Khaghan, however, did not convert until 861, and Judaism became largely a religion of the elite. Some commoners might have converted, but they became largely Christian or Muslim or retained their shamanic beliefs.

The conversion was largely due to the influence of Bulan, a military commander or *bek*. His success in introducing the new religion gave his position a new significance resulting in the rise of a dual kingship in the ninth century. The khaghan became more symbolic, while the descendants of Bulan carried out the day-to-day business as the *khaghan bek* or *isha*, who commanded the army and had the real power. While the Khaghan had a sacred status, he could be replaced if necessary.⁷⁶

While the conversion may have stymied Byzantine and Islamic influence in the court, like the Uighur conversion to Manichaeism, it created a gap

74 Kevin Alan Brook, *The Jews of Khazaria* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), pp. 128–29.

75 Brook, *Jews of Khazaria*, pp. 108–109. 76 Brook, *Jews of Khazaria*, pp. 47–52.

between the elite and the common Khazars. This disaffection affected the Khazars detrimentally in all areas. Their military ceased to be dominated by Khazar nomads and was increasingly dominated by other Turks or Muslim mercenaries, although it remained the only standing army in the region. Turkic vassals, known as Pechenegs, also increased their autonomy as the Khazars weakened.

In the early tenth century, there was little reason to think the Khazars would disappear as a power, with a professional military and government which used Turkic runes. Indeed, the state operated more efficiently than ever. However, it also lost the ability to police the steppe. As the nomads were no longer tied to the rulers, they no longer assisted the khaghan willingly. This was not simply due to the nomads' resentment of the conversion, but the fact that the khaghan and elite paid more attention to commerce than tradition. At the same time, the Pechenegs in the Pontic steppes and the Magyars in the Danubian Alföld Plain emerged as threats that raided Khazar territories. The Pechenegs were so disruptive that the Byzantine Emperor Porphyrogenitus (r. 913–959) viewed them as the dominant force. Eventually the Khazars lost the Pontic steppes and were confined to the territory between the Black and Caspian seas. In their own territory the Alans began to assert themselves; possibly because they converted to Christianity they did not want to be ruled by Jews. In essence the Khazars were losing territory and saw their trade routes cut and a loss of income. Bulghar benefited from this. It also converted to Islam and ceased to be a vassal of Khazar, diverting its trade to the Middle East through Central Asia. The Rus' also became a threat, sailing down the rivers and raiding. As a result of the loss of the Volga trade and also ongoing chaos in the form of Rus' and Pecheneg attacks, the Khazars never recovered.

Uighurs

The Uighurs Khaghanate rose in Mongolia in 744 out of the ashes of the Second Turkic Khaghanate. The dominant member of the Tokuz Oghuz (nine tribes) confederation, the Uighurs followed the now predictable pattern of stabilizing Mongolia and then expanding so that their influence reached into Tarim Basin and Ferghana Valley by 800. Contrary to the views of Tonyukuk, the Uighurs were more open to outside influence, both pastoral and sedentary. The runic writing system used by the Turks did not carry over, and the Uighurs adopted a writing style from Central Asia derived from Syriac, introduced to them by Sogdian Manichaean missionaries.

Further straying from the wisdom of Tonyukuk, the Uighurs also built cities. The most important city was their capital known as Ordu Balik, later known as Karabalasghun, located near the Selenga River in the Orkhon Valley of Mongolia. Control of the Orkhon valley became very important to legitimizing any confederation, and the practice dated back to the Xiongnu period.⁷⁷ Although Ordu Balik started simply as the royal camp, which is the meaning of the name, the camp became a permanent site with a sedentary population inhabiting it all year round and as a commercial center on the Silk Roads.

The Uighurs preferred to trade with the Tang for luxury goods rather than raid. They had accepted Tang “suzerainty,” but in the late 700s it was primarily a facade. In the 750s, the Tang suffered a number of defeats and faced a growing number of rebellions, forcing the weakened Tang government to rely upon Uighur military support. The Uighurs took advantage of Chinese weakness in the 750s to renegotiate tribute agreements. The Tang had to comply or risk losing Uighur support. As a result, the Uighurs crushed several rebellions including that of An Lushan.

The Uighurs also enter history as the only state to adopt Manichaeism as a religion. Their encounter with Manichaeism occurred with their occupation of Loyang during the An Lushan rebellion. In 762, Yidijian Khan converted to Manichaeism and brought a number of Sogdian Manichaeans back to Ordu Balik.⁷⁸ Over time, a large number of Uighurs converted as well. No one really knows why Yidijian converted to a religion that promoted vegetarianism, among many things, that went contrary to nomadic practices. Perhaps he had a moment like that of Asoka and regretted the destruction his armies caused. A more cynical and pragmatic Yidijian may have seen it as a way to counter possible Chinese acculturation that came with Buddhism and Taoism, as the Khazars did in the face of Muslim and Christian missionaries. Whatever the reason, the religion did not establish deep roots among the Uighurs, as the religion’s ban on dairy products did not really allow for the average nomad to develop a deep attachment.

Manichaeism may have hastened the fall of the Uighurs. Scholars and observers from the Uighur era thought it made them too “soft,” in the same manner that Tonyukuk worried about Daoism and Buddhism. In addition, not all of the Uighur confederation accepted the religion. It appears to have been the cause of Yidijian’s assassination, which led to a purge of his family in

77 Larry W. Moses, “Relations with the Inner Asian Barbarian,” in John Curtis Perry and Bardwell L. Smith (eds.), *Essays on T’ang Society* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), pp. 90–109.

78 Barfield, *Perilous Frontier*, pp. 158–59.

779 by his successor Alp Kutlugh. This purge did not eliminate Manichaeism, as it remained influential among the Uighurs in 813.⁷⁹ In reality, Manichaeism was a symptom of larger problems. While it is true that the Uighurs lost their vitality, Manichaeism was not the only cause. As with the building of a capital city, the adoption of Manichaeism and the extravagance of the court separated the rulers from the ruled, as with the Khazars. In order to maintain this lifestyle, even before the conversion, the Uighurs focused more on commerce rather than maintaining their military strength. Furthermore, the cities served, as Tonyukuk warned Bilge Khan, as an easy target for rebels and invaders. The Kirghiz rebelled in 821 and eventually destroyed the Uighurs in 840. Famine and a series of bad weather events between the two incidents left the Uighurs too weak to oppose the Kirghiz rebellion. The Kirghiz forced the Uighurs out of Mongolia, but the Uighurs found refuge in their former domains in the Tarim Basin, where they established a new kingdom that lasted well into the fourteenth century as part of the Mongol Empire.

Central Eurasia on the eve of the millennium

As the second millennium began, the Central Eurasian steppes were quite different. Although much of the social culture of the pastoral nomads remained similar, the material culture differed as did the identity of the nomads. Whereas Indo-Europeans once held sway over the steppes to the Altai Mountains, now Altaic groups of Turkic identity dominated smaller Indo-European populations. The stirrup and trousers were now standard features for all societies in Eurasia, yet the deadly horse archer remained largely a steppe phenomenon, but one that spread in the eleventh century as Turks entered the Middle East in large numbers.

In addition, the Central Eurasian steppes lacked a single dominant entity. The Mongolian steppes in the east were partially dominated by the Liao Empire of Manchurian origin, while the Pontic and Caspian steppes were ruled by confederations of Turkic groups such as the Pechenegs and Kipchaks, with the Kipchaks eventually becoming the preeminent pastoral nomadic group in the twelfth century. With the collapse of the Khazar Empire, however, the nomads lacked a central authority and ceased to be a major power, although they remained formidable. Nonetheless, the steppes remained crucial in world history for trade routes that crisscrossed it and

79 Christian, *History of Russia*, pp. 269–71.

nomads serving not only as customers but also as guards and suppliers of caravan animals. The importance of the pastoral nomad did not end, though, but reached its peak with the rise of the Mongol Empire in the thirteenth century.

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PART II

*

TRANS-REGIONAL AND
REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Western and Central Eurasia

TOURAJ DARYAEE

It is a daunting task to define the pre-modern Eurasian world between the second millennium BCE and the first millennium CE. One has to traverse systems and empires stretching from the Oxus and the Indus, and beyond the Taklimakan Desert through the oasis cities to the Iranian Plateau. From there the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus lie to the north and the Persian Gulf across the desert to the south. Mesopotamia, the fertile land often called the “Cradle of Civilization,” appears after passing the Zagros Mountains. The Mesopotamian land is fed by two rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, which travel south from the arc of the Fertile Crescent into the Persian Gulf.¹ In Mesopotamia to the south, much like the oases of Central Asia, trading towns prevail, while its center faces a desert. It is through the northern fertile zone, south of the Caucasus, that one can travel to the Eastern Mediterranean.² To the north is the Black Sea, another economic hub.³ The Mediterranean brings North Africa, the Near East, and Southern Europe into convergence. Unlike the oases and desert settlements, or the mountainous regions, the Mediterranean Sea defines a cultural sphere which has from time to time been unified, first in the second century BCE by the Romans, but much longer as an economic zone.

Around 1200 BCE, changes began to occur in the Afro-Eurasian world that can be attributed to both technological innovation and the coming of invaders, commonly called the Sea People. The Assyrian Empire was able to bring

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1 For the history and significance of the Persian Gulf, see Lawrence G. Potter (ed.), *The Persian Gulf in History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

2 For the history and significance of the Mediterranean, see Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

3 For the history and significance of the Black Sea, see Neal Ascherson, *Black Sea* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).

a significant part of the Eurasian world together as the first imperial system of antiquity. Two millennia later, around 900 CE, the Abbasid Caliphate, based on the former Sasanian Persian and Eastern Roman empires, created a similar commonwealth along the Mediterranean, but which now extended all the way to the River Oxus and Central Asia. The Abbasids were thus the conclusion of the aspirations to world empire that characterize the period between the second millennium BCE and the end of the first millennium CE. So, both geographically and politically, there are ways we can imagine and provide some basic outlines, contours, structures, and major eras of rupture in the history of the region.

Around 1200 BCE three important events brought major changes to the Eurasian world. The first was climatic changes that climaxed around 1200 BCE with a severe drought in the Eastern Mediterranean region. By 1200 BCE, at the end of this warming period, people living alongside lakes were forced to leave, and water levels began to rise in certain regions.⁴ This climatic episode brought about major population movements that included Libyans, Israelites, Aramaeans, Phrygians, and the Sea People.⁵ This change is thought to have contributed to a period of chaos and disorder that ushered in the “Dark Age” and the end of the Bronze Age in the Eastern Mediterranean, Anatolia, and Syria.⁶ This movement of people, such as the Sea People who displaced the organized sedentary ruling elites, led to the weakening of states such as Egypt during the reign of Ramesses III, to Aramaean incursions in the Near East (Assyria and Babylonia), and of Mycenaeans into Greece, and finally the total collapse of the Hittites in Anatolia. It appears to have been climate changes, then, that propelled various groups, possibly nomads, to move into the more centralized states and bring about their decline.

Innovations in metal use and warfare technique are another indication of these changes. For example, the use of chariots became popular in Eurasia in the second millennium BCE. Archaeologists note that the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-Europeans had already ascended onto the Iranian Plateau and the Indian subcontinent because of the domestication of horses and the use of chariots. It was the chariot in the second millennium BCE that enabled these

4 William James Burroughs, *Climate Change: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 250–51.

5 Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000–330 BC*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 1995), vol. II, p. 386.

6 Barry Weiss, “The Decline of Late Bronze Age Civilization as a Possible Response to Climatic Change,” *Climatic Change* 4 (1982): 134–35.

people not only to begin to move (notably Indo-European speakers such as Germanic, Baltic, Slavic, Italic, Celtic, Armenian, and Phrygian) over long distances but also to dominate the areas they entered. The chariot was used in the Near East all the way to Mycenae in Greece and also Egypt. The Vedic hymns of the Aryan invaders of India and the *Iliad* of the Greek world offer the poetic memory of such traditions.⁷ Robert Drews, in criticizing the prevalent theories about the reasons for the major changes in 1200 BCE, has completed the picture by suggesting that changes in military technology brought about the end of the Bronze Age. He believes that the people who were on the move were able to overwhelm the centralized states using chariots in Libya, Palestine, Israel, Lycia, northern Greece, Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, and a few other places, and by simply employing javelins and a large number of infantry in direct battle.⁸ The last major innovation/change was the use of iron instead of bronze. This change impacted both the military and the religious practices of the people in Eurasia. Swords became stronger, and dedicatory objects that were once inscribed on bronze withered away.

Assyria: the “Mesopotamian Core”

In Assyria, the rule of the Middle Assyrian Empire, which rose out of the ashes of the Mitanni Empire, continued throughout the twelfth century. At the same time that Merneptah was dealing with the Sea People and the Libyans, the famed Assyrian emperor Tukulti-Ninurta I (the possible model for the biblical Nimrod)⁹ was expanding his empire at the expense of the remnants of the Hittite Empire. He also temporarily removed the Kassite ruler of Babylonia and carried him in chains to Assyria, naming himself the “King of Sumer and Akkad,” the traditional title of the rulers of Babylonia.

Assyria was still largely in control of the trade routes in eastern Anatolia, while the control of the Syrian trade routes guaranteed access to the Mediterranean. Internal strife among the descendants of Tukulti-Ninurta amounted to a problem of succession, and less than thirty years later, another Assyrian reformer, Ashur-Dan I (1179–1133), managed to stabilize the empire during his long reign. Among his achievements was gaining control of much

7 David W. Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 411, 461–62.

8 Robert Drews, *The End of the Bronze Age: Changes in Warfare and the Catastrophic ca. 1200 B C* (Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 210.

9 Marc Van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East* (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Pub, 2004), vol. 1, p. 182.

of northern Babylonia after the demise of the Kassite Dynasty, which had ruled Babylonia for over 300 years. This action put Assyria in direct, and quite hostile, contact with the rising power of the Middle Elamite Kingdom under one of its most powerful rulers, Shutruk-Nahhunte, who eventually came to control Babylonia and Lower Mesopotamia after the disappearance of Kassite power.¹⁰ The Code of Hammurabi, the statue of the great Mesopotamian deity Marduk, and other valuables were all carried by the Elamites to Susa in the southwestern Iranian Plateau as a sign of victory.¹¹

The Dark Ages in the Near East

The period after 1050 BCE is often called the Dark Ages in Near Eastern history, mainly because the dearth of records leaves the period rather dark for historians. Common Babylonian and Assyrian inscriptions disappear in this period, and little else can be found to provide us with a narrative of the history of the period. In the Levant and Anatolia, the situation is similar, although occasional Luwian hieroglyphic inscriptions, providing standard accounts of events in the Neo-Hittite kingdoms of Cilicia and eastern Anatolia, are exceptions to this general rule. Additionally, the evidence of the Old Testament, despite its focus on the history of Judea and Israel, is of some use, as it does provide some information about the formation of Aramean polities such as the kingdom of Damascus, or Judea/Israel itself.¹²

This is, probably not coincidentally, also the period that the archaeological records point toward as the time of Iranian, and larger Indo-European, migrations. Iranian-speaking tribes, later to be divided and identified as Medes, Parthians, and Persians, appear to have moved to the Iranian Plateau around 1000 BCE, or have become distinguished from their Indo-Aryan brethren. This is also the approximate date of the composition of the earliest part of the *Avesta*, the *Gathas of Zoroaster*, which linguistically are put around 1000 BCE.¹³ It would, however, take a few centuries for the first effects of the Iranian-speaking tribes on Middle Eastern affairs to be felt.¹⁴

10 D. T. Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 231–58.

11 Dominique Charpin, “The History of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Overview,” in Jack M. Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), vol. 1, p. 821.

12 Van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, pp. 122–25, 223.

13 J. P. Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology and Myth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), pp. 49, 52.

14 Elena E. Kuz'mina, *The Origin of the Indo-Iranians*, ed. J. P. Mallory (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 454–55.

The Urartu kingdom and the Assyrians

Urartu was a largely highland kingdom that controlled the mountain passes and trade routes on the eastern Taurus region. Grand fortresses and other military installments gave it an air of military domination, which in the face of Assyrian threats is probably not a wrong assumption. From the time of Sarduri and his later descendants, Urartu spread from Lake Van to Lake Urmia in the ninth century BCE. However, Urartu certainly had a strong economic function as well, particularly in its control of the mines in the Taurus and northern Zagros, but also intensive cultivation and hydraulic works.¹⁵ By all accounts, it was a rich kingdom that provided a real challenge to Assyria in the ninth and eighth centuries BCE, and culturally had an enormous effect on its successor polities, both the Medes and the Armenians.

Meanwhile, Assyrian rulers Ashurnasirpal (883–859 BCE) and Shalmaneser III (859–824 BCE) consolidated and established Assyria's direct control over its territories, integrated eastern Anatolia and northern Syria into Assyria proper, established direct control over Babylonia, and defeated the remaining forces of Egypt and its allies at the battle of Qarqar on Orontes in 853 BCE. Shalmaneser's successors faced some internal turbulence in their empire, but managed to successfully control their possessions and exert power over much of the Near East and Iran, even reducing the enduring power of Elam. Major construction of monumental buildings using extensive human and material resources now took place in specific locations. The building of Kalkhu (modern Nimrud) included a 4.2-mile-long wall. At Khorsabad and Nineveh the same pattern of monumental structures and human effort is documented where thousands of workers were involved. But these major constructions finally brought ruin to the original Assyrian Empire and led to its collapse.

The Neo-Assyrian Empire

In the late eighth century, however, a series of conqueror-builder kings took Assyria to the height of its power and ushered in the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Starting with Tiglath-Pileser III and continuing with Sargon II, and Sennacherib, these kings expanded the Assyrian territory even further to the end of Anatolia, confronting the nascent Greek states that were emerging from their own Dark Ages. They also completely subdued the tribes of the Zagros region, including the Mannaeans and the Medes in Iran, and absorbed the remains of the Urartan

¹⁵ P. Zimansky, "The Kingdom of Urartu in Eastern Anatolia," in Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 1, p. 1139.

power in 743 BCE, which was destroyed by the Cimmerian invasions from the Caucasus. The Neo-Assyrian Empire stretched from Susa in Iran to Thebes in Egypt,¹⁶ thus constituting an Afro-Asiatic empire in the eighth century BCE.

Internally, realizing the limitations of the cultic center of Ashur, these kings embarked upon creating a series of new capitals, most importantly the city of Kalhu, already an important urban site in the Middle Assyrian period, but also completely new foundations such as Dur-Sharrukin whose impressive remains at Khorsabad display the Assyrian glory even today. It appears, however, that Nineveh, another Middle Assyrian site, was to be the last enduring capital of Assyria, established by Esarhaddon, another prolific emperor of the early seventh century. A final push to expand Assyria, including a direct invasion of Elam and the destruction of Susa under Ashur-banipal (669–627 BCE), however, seems to have been the straw that broke the camel's back.

By the time of Ashur-banipal, Assyria was the undisputed master of the Levant, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and western Iran. However, its economic basis on the agriculture of Assyria, supplemented by the booty from the conquered lands and tributes, was stretched quite thin, as the local farming community could no longer feed gigantic urban sites such as Ashur, Kalhu, Nineveh, or Dur-Sharrukin. Supplies of food had to be brought in from Syria, Babylonia, and Anatolia, which by necessity could not have been reliable. At the same time, a rural Aramean population, which spread across the land and over the borders of Assyria proper and into Babylonia, Syria, and Anatolia, entertained ideas of a better political presence than submission to the Assyrians. In the south, the newly formed Chaldean kingdom of Babylonia used the occasion of a fight between Ashur-banipal and his brother, the viceroy of Babylonia, to rise in rebellion. Nabopolassar, a Chaldean chief, then managed to unite most of Babylonia, except Nippur, against Assyria, and, for the first time in over two centuries, establish an independent Babylonian dynasty. Egypt, another Assyrian possession since Esarhaddon's time, also managed to create its own local dynasty and thus gain independence.

Assyria's military class too was quite stretched and could no longer be maintained purely by the local population. Mercenaries, as well as integrated soldiers from among the Cimmerians and Medes, were a common presence in the Assyrian army, in effect controlling many of the mid-level positions of the officer corps. A conspiracy, partly managed by Cyaxares, a local chief of the Medes, but largely orchestrated by Nabopolassar of Babylonia, resulted in a major *coup d'état* against Sin-sharr-ishkun, himself an Assyrian usurper, in

16 Charpin, "History of Ancient Mesopotamia," vol. 1, p. 823.

616 BCE. Median corps from inside the Assyrian army started to take control of the military, while a joint Babylonian-Median army started to systematically invade and sack Kalhu and other Assyrian cities.¹⁷ A protracted war lasted for several years from 627 BCE and ended up with the invasion of Nineveh in 612 BCE, essentially ending the power of Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire at the hands of the Medes and the Babylonians.

The Neo-Babylonian Empire (612–539 BCE)

This major reconfiguration of the political scene of the Near East essentially left a substantial vacuum in regional politics. Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 BCE) was the longest ruling and strongest of Chaldean rulers of Babylonia. The reign of Nebuchadnezzar is known to us mainly through the Old Testament's account of the sack of Judea and the mass deportation of its population to Babylonia, the event often known as the "Babylonian captivity."¹⁸ The sack of Judea in fact was part of Nebuchadnezzar's larger campaign to bring the Phoenician city-states and Aramean states such as Damascus under his rule, and to check the efforts of Egyptian Pharaoh Amasis. The latter was trying to re-create a puppet version of the Assyrian Empire in order to limit the expansion of Babylonia. Judea, located on a major route from the Levant to Egypt, was then an important crossroads that needed to be secured.

The mass deportation of population, such as the case of Jews from Judea to Babylon, was in fact the continuation of an older practice by the Assyrians. Since the ninth century, Assyrians had undertaken this action in order to achieve both economic and strategic gains. The removal of population guaranteed that a hostile area would be cleared of its unfriendly population, while the deported population, completely at the mercy of the empire, acted as useful menial and skilled labor in the areas where they were needed. This is evident in the case of the exiled Jewish population, some of whom, even after the granting of freedom by Cyrus the Great, chose to remain in Babylonia and in fact became some of the most prolific agriculturalists and urban merchants of the region.

Nebuchadnezzar II, following the tradition of Assyrian emperors, undertook many building projects in Babylon itself. The famous Gate of Ishtar,

17 Joan Oates, "The Fall of Assyria (635–609 BC)," in John Boardman, I. E. S. Edwards, E. Sollberger, and N. G. L. Hammond (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge University Press, 1992), vol. 111, part 2, pp. 162–93.

18 Oded Lipschitz and Joseph Blenkinsopp (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003).

as well as the processional street leading to Esagila, the sacred temple of Marduk, was his obvious effort to return the glory of yore to Babylon.¹⁹ His reputation for building is also at the root of his fame as the founder of the great Hanging Gardens of Babylon, possibly a copy of Shalmanasser's botanical and zoological gardens in Kalhu. The story of his marriage to a Median princess, in light of the new evidence about the absence of an actual Median kingdom, might be a myth,²⁰ but certainly shows his close connections to the eastern states. Nebuchadnezzar's reign, in short, constitutes the brief glorious period of the already brief Neo-Babylonian Empire.²¹

In 556, Nabonid (or Nabonidus in Greek sources), a maternal grandson of Ashur-banipal from the city of Harran, the last stand of Ashur-ubalit II, murdered Labashi-Marduk, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. Probably on account of his association with Harran, and as a result of the propaganda of the Babylonian priesthood, his name has been best associated with the cult of the god Sin, the moon god of Assyria. Based on the largely hostile accounts, such as that of the Cylinder of Cyrus, he is represented as a negligent king who was more concerned with promoting the cult of Sin and neglected the cult of Marduk, the official cult of Babylonia, and also largely left the empire to his son and regent, Belshazzar. The dissatisfaction with the rule of Nabonidus, then, led to the invasion of Cyrus, the king of Anshan, and the end of the Babylonian Empire.²²

The Afro-Eurasian world united: the Achaemenid Persian Empire

The Achaemenid Empire was an example of a successful attempt to establish a socio-economic and political world system whose influence dominated the region for at least the thousand years that followed its disappearance from the historical narrative, and even up to the present. The institutions that the Achaemenid system managed to install in their Iranian territories guaranteed the continuity of historical progression for millennia to come. The Achaemenid system, based on the political dominance of a centralized

19 Charpin, "History of Ancient Mesopotamia," vol. 1, p. 826.

20 Giovanni B. Lanfranchi, Michael Roaf, and Robert Rollinger, "Afterword," in Lanfranchi, Roaf, and Rollinger (eds.), *Continuity of Empire: Assyria, Media, Persia* (Padova: S.a.r.g.o.n. Editrice e Libreria, 2003), pp. 402–403.

21 David Weisberg, "The 'Antiquarian' Interests of the Neo-Babylonian Kings," in J. G. Westenholz (ed.), *Capital Cities: Urban Planning and Spiritual Dimensions* (Jerusalem: Bible Land Museum, 1998), pp. 177–86.

22 Charpin, "History of Ancient Mesopotamia," vol. 1, p. 826.

power, exploitation of economic peripheries, and the central processing and distribution of economic resources, was indeed a world-system in its basic form. The Achaemenid Empire, unlike the empires before it, was not based on the political oppression and economic destruction of conquered regions, but rather on a well-designed system of political support for economic production and expansion throughout the whole empire and a localized, non-franchised taxation system which was at the same time directly dependent on the central power. In this system, the imperial center, as a major consumer but also the focal point of all economic activity, was indeed the core of the system, while the economic production and consumption of outlying areas related to and depended on the economy of the center and both fed the center and was manipulated by it.

The Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BCE), from its origin as the result of conquests by Cyrus II of Persia (later known with the eponym “the Great”) and his son Cambyses to the complicated administrative and financial power that it became under the rule of Darius I (again “the Great,” and quite deservedly so) and Xerxes I, was a true “world empire” and a political unit that deserves to be studied for its effects on subsequent world history. In a sense, one could also argue that the Achaemenid Empire was the culmination of c. 3,000 years of civilization and about 2,000 years of exercise in empire-building in the Near East. No one could claim that the Achaemenid Empire was a newcomer to world history, as no entity could have existed without strong ties to what came before it. However, despite being a continuation of the imperial systems that preceded it, the Achaemenid Empire was also something quite new, indeed an innovator in humanity’s continuous efforts to organize its affairs.

Cyrus II, the founder of the Achaemenid Empire, is a great example of what the empire embodied and how it saw and defined itself. Cyrus was the local ruler of a city well known in ancient history, the city of Anšan/Anzan, long famed as the “highland” capital of the Elamite state. It was from here that the Elamites often descended upon the Susiana Plain to form strong kingdoms and oppose the Babylonians and Assyrians, and to these same highlands they often retreated when their opponents gained the upper hand. Cyrus, in this sense, was the ruler of an ancient city with ancient traditions and well-established administrative and hierarchical systems.

Cyrus’ conquests of Anatolia, another old seat of civilization, one based on seafaring and agriculture, as well as the heavily agricultural civilization of Mesopotamia, were the first steps in realizing what the Achaemenids ultimately came to represent. The Assyrians had also tried to take advantage of

the resources offered by the Anatolian highlands,²³ and, as we have seen, they, along with the Babylonians, must also be credited with the first attempts at conquering and controlling the rest of West Asia in this case.

However, the conquest by Cyrus of Anatolia and Babylonia, as well as the rest of the Iranian Plateau, represents a dramatic change of tone and direction for this heir of the ancient Near Eastern empires. Cyrus, or shortly after him Darius, put the newly conquered lands under a firm and well-organized imperial system in which the territories were divided into semi-autonomous provinces ruled by local administrators. At the same time, the empire had a visible presence in each province (or *Satrapai*, from Old Persian *xšathrapaiti*) via its agents, tax assessors, and garrison commanders. But what is unique in Cyrus' empire is not the administration, something that would be perfected by Darius I, but rather his remarkable success in achieving what had not been done before: a largely peaceful union of the ancient rival civilizations of Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Elam, and the Iranian Plateau. This is evident from Cyrus' own statements and propaganda as to his deeds and actions in comparison with earlier Assyrian and Babylonian narratives and their views of the conquered people.

Darius (521–486 BCE) is called "great," not, like Cyrus or Alexander, because of his conquests, of which he had a few, but because he was effectively the founder of the system which remains the basis of state administration in the world even today. He perfected the provincial system of Cyrus, appointing local rulers closely watched by the "Great King's Eyes and Ears." The taxation system was truly reformed, creating a more effective and economically encouraging system unprecedented up to the time. The safety of the empire was guaranteed by the establishment of local garrisons responsible only to the Great King himself. In this way, Darius took central responsibility for the basic role of the government, protecting its citizens, while at the same time removing the threat of rebellion by the local rulers.²⁴

Darius' creation of a Royal Road system, some 1,400 miles long, was a major achievement. The construction of a royal artery with its station (*stathmoi*) and guard stations (*phylakteria*) created one of the safest and quickest avenues of communication, with inns (*katagogai*) and caravanserais (*kataluseis*).²⁵ But

23 Van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, pp. 127–35.

24 Muhammad A. Dandamaev and Vladimir G. Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 96–115.

25 David F. Graf, "The Persian Royal Road System," in Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg, Amélie Kuhrt, and Margaret Cool Root (eds.), *Achaemenid History VIII: Continuity and Change: Proceedings of the Last Achaemenid History Workshop, April 6–8, 1990 Ann Arbor, Michigan* (Leiden: Brill 1994), p. 167.

again, like Cyrus, his greatest achievement, and what distinguishes the Achaemenid Empire particularly, is the fact that under Darius' rule, the great ancient hydraulic civilizations of the Nile, Mesopotamia, and Indus were united under the same political system that was also shared with the Iranian Plateau and Anatolia as well.

Darius created an imperial system that was very much mindful of its economic function. In this system, roads and waterways were constructed and opened for trade and communication. It is during Darius I's rule that the first version of a canal connecting the Mediterranean to the Red Sea was constructed, where ships could actually navigate the waterways from Africa to Asia.²⁶ The Chaluf cuneiform text suggests that Darius wanted to connect the waterways of the empire, creating further connections between Egypt and Iran.²⁷

Agricultural production, one of the most important sources of income for the empire, was given equal attention through the construction of a major canal system, as well as an innovative system of *qanāts* (Arabic: a water storage system used in arid and semi-arid regions) which broadened the possibility of cultivation from Egypt to Arabia, and Persia.²⁸ Thus, cultivation was made possible not only at the river basin but also at the in-between arid regions through this ingenious innovation. These operations were meant to create an economic system on a scale the Eurasian world had not experienced before.

For the people of Afro-Eurasia, the Achaemenid system represented and provided several things. In its remarkable uniformity, the empire offered a consistency that could assist larger enterprises beyond subsistence-level production. In this aspect, mostly reflected through taxation, the state allowed the producer to plan for profit making, eventually causing a form of specialization that naturally resulted in higher production reflected by an observable improvement of living standards. In its tolerance and flexibility, the empire allowed for localization, leaving the Aegean or Phoenician merchants to roam the seas and look for profits where they were, while allowing the nomadic pastoralist to raise his cattle and the farmer to utilize all his resources.

26 Dandamaev and Lukonin, *Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, pp. 210–11.

27 Christopher Tuplin, "Darius' Suez Canal and Persian Imperialism," in Sancisi-Weerdenburg, Kuhrt, and Root (eds.), *Achaemenid History VIII*, p. 244.

28 Pierre Briant, "Polybe X.28 et les qanāts: le témoignage et ses limites," in Briant (ed.), *Irrigation et drainage dans l'Antiquité, qanāts et canalisations souterraines en Iran, en Égypte et en Grèce, séminaire tenu au Collège de France sous la direction de Pierre Briant* (Paris: Persika, 2001), pp. 15–40.

The same lasting effect can be observed in Achaemenid cultural policies. It is remarkable that a word translatable to “multicultural” (Old Persian *vispazanānām*) was used in an inscription of Darius at Naqš-e Rostam to describe the empire.²⁹ The Achaemenid administration is famed for having adopted, and indeed cultivated, the Aramaic language and script, as its uniform means of communication.

In terms of its political view, the Achaemenid Empire embodied the idea of justice and order. The Old Persian term used for this concept is *arta*, which carries the cosmic notion of order amidst chaos. The king’s law was established to do justice to Ahuramazdā’s benevolent creation where there would be “good horses, good men,” and there would be no “(enemy) army, nor crop failure nor Falsehood.”³⁰ The King of Kings was also one who administered justice and his (Old Persian) *dātā*- “law” was held supreme. He, in fact, upheld the democratic institutions for the Greek-inhabited cities on the Ionian coast and the tradition of other Satrapies, while the Persian monarchy upheld an all-encompassing law that did not interfere with the local tradition.³¹

Alexander and the Hellenistic Age: from India and Afghanistan to Macedonia and Egypt

In the fourth century BCE, a new powerful force from Macedonia changed the political map of the Afro-Eurasian world and reconfigured its cultural and developmental make-up. Philip of Macedon, followed by his son Alexander the Great, conquered the Greek city-states and with a new military composed of Greco-Macedonians, using new military equipment and tactics, began their invasion of the Afro-Eurasian world. Three major battles were fought between 334 BCE when Alexander crossed the Hellespont and 330 BCE when his main opponent, Darius III, died. The battles of Granicus, Issus, and Gaugamela brought the Macedonian king closer and closer to the unification of the Eastern Mediterranean and Afro-Asiatic world. By 331 BCE, after the last battle, Alexander was proclaimed as the “King of Asia,” and in Babylon he was called the “King of the Universe.”³² This symbolically signaled the changing of the guards in terms of power and rulership between the

29 Rüdiger Schmitt, *The Old Persian Inscription of Naqsh-e Rostam and Persepolis* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 2000), part 1, pp. 25 and 29.

30 Schmitt, *Old Persian Inscription*, p. 58.

31 Pierre Briant, “L’histoire de l’empire achéménide aujourd’hui: l’historien et ses documents,” *Annales HSS* 5 (1999): 1135.

32 Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), p. 862.

Persians and Greco-Macedonians. The conquest also led to colonization of the Afro-Asiatic world by the conquerors. The further consequence of this change of power was the movement of money and wealth from Asia to the Mediterranean; the sacking and pillaging of the Persian capital Persepolis alone added some 2,500 tons of gold to Alexander's treasury. While this was the greatest capture of wealth in antiquity, it was one of the many hoards that Alexander was able to get his hands on to finance his further conquest in Asia.

After defeating Darius III, Alexander marched into Bactria, roughly equated with modern Afghanistan, and through alliance with the local king cemented his power. Through this union, among others he had with the daughters of Darius III, Alexander attempted to establish his power in Asia and promote himself and his heirs as the legitimate heirs to the Persian Empire. He even found religious and supernatural justification through his visit to the Oracle at Siwah, deep in the Egyptian desert. There he was told that he was in fact the Son of God and that he was destined to be the Pharaoh. Thus, Alexander found moral and religious justification for his conquest of Asia through Africa and became master of both, however briefly. As king of Asia and son of Ammon, and as a great military commander, Alexander was able to bring the Afro-Eurasia world zone closer than ever before. There are even speculations that Alexander was very much aware of his aim, which sometimes is romantically called the "Unity of Mankind."³³

When Alexander died in Babylonia in 323 BCE, the Afro-Eurasian world might have appeared to be unified, but it was soon plunged into further crisis and warfare, something that the region did not recover from for almost a century.³⁴ Already major cities such as Tyre, Sidon, and Persepolis had been destroyed, but the war over who was the true heir of Alexander brought about incessant struggle and destruction. The major generals who took over the short-lived empire of Alexander the Great included Seleucus Nicator, who ruled over much of (West) Asia and the largest portion of the former Achaemenid Empire, from Samarkand in Central Asia to Sardis in Asia Minor.³⁵ At the time the Seleucids looked more like ancient Near Eastern rulers in terms of ritual and the idea of kingship.³⁶ From early on, Seleucia-on-

33 W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great* (Cambridge University Press, 1948), vol. II, p. 400; contra E. Badian, "Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind," *Historia* 7 (1958): 425–44.

34 Francois Chamoux, *Hellenistic Civilization* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), p. 40.

35 For a stimulating way of looking at the Seleucids, see Susan Sherwin-White and Amélie Kuhrt, *From Samarkand to Sardis: A New Approach to the Seleucid Empire* (London: Duckworth, 1993).

36 Peter Green, *The Hellenistic Age: A Short History* (New York: Modern Library Edition, 2007), pp. 17–18.

the-Tigris in Mesopotamia and Babylon itself became the centers of activity, and in many ways the old Achaemenid tradition continued in terms of political and administrative structure. In time the Seleucids moved westward and made Syria, with Antioch-on-the-Orontes, their main center of power until their demise.

Ptolemy I was able to hold on to Egypt, where Hellenism now left deep impressions on the ancient civilization of that land. The empire controlled the economy, exporting cereals that made Egypt the breadbasket of the Mediterranean world. Egypt also became an important center of learning that brought the Hellenic and Egyptian traditions together, although it became increasingly pharaonic. The other major center was Macedonia, which was ruled by Antigonos who attempted to hold it as a once great center of power, from where the house of Alexander had arisen. There were then three centers of power, which kept something of a sense of equilibrium through to the third century BCE. Thus, the once centralized empire of the Achaemenids gave way to what has been called a polycentric empire in the Hellenistic period.

The civil war between these powers and other generals and minor kings was a cause of constant instability in the ancient world. But what spread throughout all of these empires was Hellenistic culture and civilization, coexisting with the local traditions. Alexandria in Egypt and Ai Khanum in Afghanistan are the two most notable examples at the opposite ends of this Afro-Eurasian world, where many cities were established either by Alexander the Great or by his generals. Amphitheaters, gymnasiums, Greek literature and way of life became common. At Ai Khanum, Iranian deities became represented through Hellenic artistic expression. Greek deities became part of the Asian religious tradition, while commemoration and the veneration of the ruler and his ancestors was practiced.³⁷ Linguistically, Greek appears to have become the second lingua franca in world history, after Aramaic in the eighth century BCE. Histories and anthropological observations on India, Afghanistan, Iran, Levant, and other places were written in Greek by and for the local population.

Still, new empires or kingdoms were created as a result of the struggle between the Seleucids and other inheritors of Alexander's empire. The outstanding example is the Mauryan Empire (321–187 BCE), which was formed

³⁷ A. K. Narain, "The Greeks of Bactria and India," in A. E. Astin, F. W. Walbank, M. W. Frederiksen, and R. M. Ogilvie (eds.), *Cambridge Ancient History* (Cambridge University Press), vol. viii, pp. 403–406.

through a long historical process.³⁸ Darius I in the sixth century BCE conquered and in effect unified northern India, and Alexander was able to defeat local and greater potentates, such as Porus. The result was the appearance of King Chandragupta Maurya from Pataliputra (321–297 BCE). He challenged the power of the Seleucids in the east during the reign of Seleucus Nicator, resulting in the exchange of gifts and marking of new boundaries. This local development was to cause wider significant changes in the history of religions when Ashoka (268–231 BCE), who expanded the Mauryan Empire to its largest extent, proclaimed Buddhism as his religious and philosophical preference. In his inscription at Sarnath, his edict signified the existence of the older tradition of the Indo-Iranian world, by having it written in the Aramaic script, the imperial script used by the former Persian Empire. By promotion of non-violence and Buddhism as a result of his gruesome conquest of the state of Kalinga, Ashoka also facilitated the expansion of Buddhism beyond his empire, spreading *dharma* to Kambojas (i.e., the Iranians) and the Yonas, the Greeks.³⁹ One consequence of this was the movement of Buddhism northwards to modern Afghanistan, where until only a decade ago, the two tallest standing Buddhas were to be found at Bamiyan. In the eighth–ninth century CE, Buddhist influence on Islamic civilization came from the same region in the guise of the Buddhist Barmakid family (from Sanskrit *paramukha*), who were the most powerful political clan in the early Abbasid Caliphate, as viziers or advisors, and were powerful and wealthy patrons of art and literature. Buddhist notions also influenced Islamic mysticism, which took form in the eastern lands of the Abbasid Caliphate. So these changes were not to be short-lived then, but rather had a long-term effect on the people and religious traditions of Asia.

Not only the civil wars within each Hellenistic kingdom but also, more importantly, new forces within the region gradually eroded Hellenistic power from both the eastern and western sides. The Greco-Bactrian kingdom on the eastern borders of the Seleucid Empire, between the Jaxartes and Oxus rivers, had broken away in c. 250 BCE, led by the former Seleucid Satrap Diodotus (c. 250–230 BCE). By the time of Demetrius I (200–190 BCE), Sogdiana was also taken, and the Hindu-Kush mountains as well. This was only a minor loss compared to the impact of the nomadic Iranian Arsacids, otherwise known as the Parthians. Moving from the east of the Caspian Sea southward, Arsaces I conquered the province of Parthia, which lay east of the Caspian

38 Elizabeth Errington and Yesta Sarkhosh-Curtis (eds.), *From Persepolis to Punjab: Exploring Ancient Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan* (London: The British Museum Press, 2007), pp. 37–38.

39 Richard Foltz, *Religions of Iran: From Prehistory to the Present* (London: One World, 2013), p. 94.

Sea, and crowned himself king in 247 BCE. This was the beginning of a long process of attrition that culminated in 147 BCE when the central Iranian Plateau was conquered and the Seleucids were pushed back into Syria by Mithridates I.⁴⁰ Ultimately it was the Romans, and in particular Pompey, who brought an end to the Seleucid Empire that by then survived only within the city of Antioch and the surrounding region.

Parthia: a world empire between Rome and China

(c. 200 BCE–c. 200 CE)

Through the second and the first centuries BCE, Arsacid Parthia, Rome, and Han China became the three main regional powers in the Eurasian world. They connected the Mediterranean in the west with the Iranian Plateau in the center, and Chinese Han Empire in the east, bringing the vast Afro-Eurasian world zone into closer contact than ever before. There were also smaller kingdoms and empires that were in between and that acted in the same way and in cooperation with them, notably the Kushan Empire (explored elsewhere in this volume). However, this section of the chapter focuses on the Parthians. It is this region and ruling power that has been missed in the coverage of world history, as Rome and China have been the main focus for world historians.

The Arsacids established the Parthian Empire in the third century BCE to the east of the Roman Empire and the west of the Han. From east of the Caspian Sea, the nomadic Parni tribes moved onto the territory of the former Seleucid Empire, annexing their eastern holdings province by province. An early capital of the Parthians was Nisa in modern-day Turkmenistan, but later it became a necropolis for the royal household. Arsaces crowned himself in what is modern Quchan in Iran in 247 BCE and for 400 years ruled over Iraq, the Iranian Plateau, part of the Caucasus, and parts of Central Asia. The early Parthians, under the influence of Hellenistic culture, seemed very much part of the Greek cultural sphere, but as time went on, the Mesopotamian and Iranian heritage of the Achaemenid Empire was emphasized. By the rule of Mithridates I (171–131 BCE), when the eastern Caspian through Mesopotamia came under Parthian control, the old Persian title of King of Kings had become a staple of Parthian royal titulature.⁴¹ With this came the Zoroastrian ideological tools of legitimation, such as the adoption of the idea of Kingly Glory,

40 Errington and Sarkhosh-Curtis (eds.), *From Persepolis to Punjab*, pp. 44–45.

41 M. Rahim Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians: Political Ideology in Post-Hellenistic and Late Antique Persia* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 40–41.

similar to the Roman *fortuna*. Its artistic representation was inherited and portrayed on coinage, through Hellenistic artistic tradition.

The King of Kings and his princes stood at the top of the court and Parthian society. The empire was divided into eighteen provinces headed by *shahrdars*, or governors. The noble houses lived in large landed estates (*dastkirt*) similar to the Roman landed estate known as the *latifunda*, and they could muster a military fighting force when needed from the lower nobility (*azats*). Those in towns and villages were protected by the landed nobility and also supported the empire when in need of a fighting force. This new form of political structure and economic system was somewhat similar to European feudalism.⁴²

The Parthians came into conflict with the expansionist Romans, especially in Mesopotamia. In 53 BCE the Parthian general Surena annihilated the Roman legions at Carrhae, and from then Romans and Parthians came to an understanding where they acknowledged their equality in power and right to rule in the east. Silk Roads trade made the Parthians rich, not only as middlemen between trading world empires but also for their own commodities and wealth. Trade was designated at the border towns between the two empires, and this trend continued into late antiquity. Towns in Armenia and Mesopotamia were significant, and the two sides forbade merchants from crossing over to the other side for trade.

Armenia was one of the small kingdoms that were important for both empires and, as a consequence, was regularly fought over by Parthia and Rome. At issue was access to new roads, also natural resources including gold, horses, and fighting men. Armenia could stay nominally independent only by manipulating both sides, which it did successfully from time to time. The Parthians also made inroads into Arabia and gained power at a few places on the Persian Gulf. This was done for military but, more importantly, economic purposes. A first-century BCE text by Isidore of Charax, the *Parthian Stations*, describes in detail the commodities and the vibrant port life throughout the duration of the Parthian Empire, from Mesopotamia to Central Asia.⁴³ Thus, now the Persian Gulf trade with the Indian Ocean and its connections to Mesopotamia became important for long-distance trade. This period also witnessed the rise of oasis towns that became part of the trade routes, from Palmyra to Hatra to Babylon, Seleucia, and finally to Spasinu Charax and Mesene. Parthians mostly controlled these towns, and many lived there, including one named Manesus, the son of Phraates, who

42 J. Wolski, *L'Empire des Arsacides* (Louvain: Peeters, 1993), p. 113.

43 Wilfred H. Schoff, *Parthian Stations by Isidore of Charax. An Account of the Overland Trade Route between the Levant and India in the First Century B.C.* (Chicago: Ares Publishers, 1914).

has left us much information; he was the tax collector and the governor in charge of Mesopotamia, as well as an *arabarch* (provincial governor).⁴⁴

The Parthians were less interested in the promotion of religion, although their adherence to Zoroastrianism became important. In the first two centuries CE, when Jews and Christians came into conflict with the Roman Empire over the worship of the emperor, many of them moved to the heartland of the Parthian Empire, i.e., Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia was one of the most cosmopolitan regions in the world, where pagans, Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, Baptists, and others lived side by side. Jews even served in the Parthian military and from time to time attempted to free their Jewish brethren in Palestine. In time, the sizable Jewish community living in Mesopotamia and the Iranian Plateau became responsible for the latter codification of Jewish law under the Babylonian Talmud.

The Parthians were also instrumental in the maintenance of the Silk Roads. During the rule of the Parthian King of Kings, Mithridates II (123–88 BCE), and that of his near contemporary the Han emperor Wudi (140–87 BCE), contacts were made between the Parthians and Chinese to facilitate their common interest. It seems that both lands enjoyed vast cultivation of rice and wheat, but the Parthians also had enormous vineyards. The large number of cities with many merchants and the silver Parthian coin were recognized by the Han. The Parthians became, in effect, not only consumers of Han export commodities but also the middlemen in the new trans-regional trade between China and the Roman world. Chinese sources are clear that the Parthians wished to trade directly with the Chinese, especially Chinese silk. This strategy prevented the Romans, until the end of the second century, from accessing China for silk directly.

To the east of the Parthian Empire stood the kingdom of Kushans. The early Kushans were descendants of a tribal confederacy known as the Yuezhi in the Chinese sources.⁴⁵ According to these sources, sometime in the mid-second century BCE the aggressive movement of the Xiongnu into Yuezhi territory forced the migration of the Yuezhi further west into Transoxiana. The Kushans eventually created their own enormous empire that flourished until the rise of the Sasanians after c. 220 CE, events explored elsewhere in this volume.

44 Malcolm A. R. Colledge, *The Parthians* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), pp. 62–63, 78–79.

45 Liu Xinru, "Migration and Settlement of the Yuezhi-Kushan: Interaction and Interdependence of Nomadic and Sedentary Societies," *Journal of World History* 12 (2001): 265.

The Sasanian Empire: a late antiquity empire

The third century ushered in important changes in the Afro-Eurasian world, where two important empires faced challenges and consolidated their power. Both began to gravitate toward communal religions, establishing imperial apparatuses that outlived their lives and created a new period in world history. The Mediterranean region was dominated by the Roman Empire, which from the third century CE began to break off into two separate political and administrative entities. The Eastern Roman Empire, also known as Byzantium, held Anatolia, Palestine, Egypt, and parts of Syria and Mesopotamia. Further east stood the Sasanian Empire, which claimed ownership over the land from the Oxus to the Euphrates River and beyond.

The Sasanian Empire came to power in the third century CE by dislodging the Parthian Empire. The founder of the Sasanian state, Ardashir, was a brilliant military leader who used religion to bring together a new vision of empire. Zoroastrianism, or the cult of Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda), appears to have been the preferred religion of the empire from the very beginning. On coins and rock reliefs the kings were shown receiving the diadem from Zoroastrian deities such as Ohrmazd or Anahita. The former Parthian nobles along with the neighboring kingdoms were brought into the fold under the name of Iranshahr (Empire of the Iranians). Despite early overtures to the universalist religion of Mani, and the gnostic-oriented Manichaeism, the empire's priestly class soon turned to establishing an imperial religion in the form of Zoroastrianism. Jews, Christians, Manichaeans, and Buddhists were persecuted while the Zoroastrian religious institutions were taking shape.⁴⁶

Wars with the Eastern Roman Empire made the Romans understand that the Sasanian Empire was a very different power from that of the Parthians. Ardashir and Alexander Severus fought one another for the control of Mesopotamia, and the Euphrates became the nominal border between the two empires, where fortifications were built. This war also brought about the decline of the caravan cities of Dura-Europos, Palmyra, and others in the third century. The second Sasanian ruler, Shapur I, defeated, killed, and held captive three successive Roman emperors. The Kushan Empire to the east also came under the control of Sasanian kings, where the Kushano-Sasanians were established as a cadet branch of the Sasanian royal family. South Central Asia then remained under Sasanian control until the Hepthalites came to displace them in the fifth century CE.

46 Touraj Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013) pp. 77–78.

By the fifth century, when Shapur II had ruled for some seven decades, Zoroastrianism had become the imperial state religion from Oxus to the Euphrates. The Magi, Adurbad Mahrspandan, by going through an ordeal, established the truth of his words and interpretation of the Good Religion.⁴⁷ At the same time that Zoroastrianism gained state favor and what may be called the creation of a Zoroastrian “orthodoxy,” Christianity became a threat to the Sasanian Empire, and it was seen as the fifth column of the Romans. In the early fourth century CE, Constantine had claimed to be the ruler of all the Christians, and this made the position of Christians precarious with the Sasanian Empire.⁴⁸ Shapur II, ironically, fought and defeated the Roman Emperor Julian the Apostate, but he himself also persecuted Christians, the objects of Julian’s intense hatred. Many martyrologies of the Persian Christian martyrs were written as a reaction to these persecutions.

Campaigns of the Sasanians in the Caucasus once again brought Georgia, Armenia, and Albania into the conflict between the Sasanians and the Romans. Raw materials, roads, and skilled laborers, along with its strategic location, gave the Caucasian polity important economic advantages, which made it a region of contention between the two empires until the fall of the Sasanians in the seventh century and the establishment of definitive control of the region by the nascent Islamic Empire. The Silk Roads remained an important land route, but now the seas became an even more important avenue for trade. The disruption of land trade due to incessant wars between the Sasanians and the Romans brought the Arabs in Southern Arabia into prominence.⁴⁹

By the fifth century, the Sasanians had established a Christian Church of Persia, with a *catholicos* living at the capital of the empire in Ctesiphon. The Sasanian capital was a cosmopolitan center, one of the largest and most populated cities of the late antiquity world, on a par with Constantinople. The Sasanians kept control of the markets in the east, especially silk, the highest quality of which was still produced by the Chinese. The Sasanian merchants famously bought all the silk on the Indian Ocean in order to control the prices and the supply of the commodities. Even the Sogdians, who were the most important traders between Persia and China, attempted to gain access directly to the Iranian Plateau and then to the Romans. The

47 Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia*, pp. 84–87.

48 Timothy D. Barnes, “Constantine and the Christians of Persia,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 75 (1985): 126–27.

49 Touraj Daryaee, “The Persian Gulf in Late Antiquity,” *Journal of World History* 14 (2003): 8–10.

Sogdians appealed to the Persian king, but he would not allow them to have direct access and be in control of Persian silk markets. Cosmas Indicopleustes gives us first-hand report on the cargoes of silk coming from the east to the Sasanian Empire. By taking over Southern Arabia in 568 CE, the Sasanians attempted to control the maritime route for silk headed to the Byzantines as well, to raise the prices.⁵⁰

Eventually Arabia also came under direct Sasanian control in the following century, allowing the Sasanians to control the trade across the Arabian side of the Indian Ocean, as well as providing direct access to copper mines. However, both the Sasanians and the Romans, while in a state of relative peace, had to face another new nomadic power on their borders, namely the Huns, who established a sedentary power on the Eurasian steppes.⁵¹ The Huns and Turkic nomadic tribes had begun their movement from inner Asia into the Sino-Iranian world. While walls were built by both the Chinese and the Sasanians in an attempt to slow the nomadic incursions into the sedentary zone, ultimately the Turks would have a decisive effect on the history of Eurasia.

In the sixth century the Turks moved out of their Altai homelands and pressed westward, forcing the Hephthalites and Kidarites to move into Sasanian territory, leading to wars. By the rule of Khusro I, the Turks were in direct contact with the Sasanian Empire and became an ally, but through the Sogdians and because of silk trade the Byzantines became their eventual collaborators. The Turkic delegation reached Constantinople in 563. In four centuries the Turkic tribes became the de facto power, from Central Asia to the Mediterranean. Just as they had become king makers with the Chinese Tang Dynasty in the seventh century CE, so they became important for the Abbasid Caliphate. Between the fifth and the seventh centuries CE, they became a major trading partner with both the sedentary empires, but also the Sogdian merchants who traversed between China and Central Asia to the border of the Sasanian Empire in Bactria.⁵²

During the reign of Khusro I in the sixth century, the king was able to undertake major reforms throughout the empire and then depose the revolutionary Zoroastrian priests. By then the coinage, administration, system of

50 Étienne de la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders: A History* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 228–29.

51 James Howard-Johnston, "State and Society in Late Antique Iran," in Vesta Sarkhosh-Curtis and Sarah Stewart (eds.), *The Idea of Iran: The Sasanian Era* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), vol. III, p. 121.

52 Denis Sinor, "The Establishment and Dissolution of the Türk empire," in Sinor (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 299–308.

taxation, and the military had all been reformed and had rejuvenated the Sasanian Empire. Zoroastrian doctrine was put into its final form and the *Avesta*, the sacred hymns, were codified and written down. Fire-temples were established around the empire, the most holy of them being that of Adur Gushnasp in northwestern Iran.

The Arch of Khusro, the highest standing building in the Near East, was built in Ctesiphon, one of the largest cities of the late antique world, as a symbol of power of the King of Kings. Thus, in the sixth century and during the reigns of Justinian in Byzantium and Khusro I in Iran, the empires reached their zenith. The Sasanians paid for the fortification of their cities, but also built long walls along their northern borders, along the west and east of the Caspian Sea to protect the Romans and themselves from the nomadic invasions. The Wall of Gorgan, the longest continuous wall in antiquity, was 196 kilometers long and had some thirty-six garrisoned barracks.⁵³ The Sui and the Tang empires of China also enjoyed closer contact with the Sasanians between the fifth and seventh centuries CE.

Thus, towards the latter part of late antiquity, Afro-Eurasian empires had expanded from the Mediterranean Sea to the Yellow Sea, with the Byzantine, Sasanian and the Sui and Tang empires, and the in-between kingdoms in contact and conflict with them. These smaller kingdoms, nomads, and traders included Armenians, Laz, Arabs, and the important Sogdians in the Caucasus, Arabia, and Central Asia. However, the three major centers of power in the world of late antiquity were Constantinople, Ctesiphon, and Chang'an, with their emperors and kings and their opulent court rituals and ceremonies.⁵⁴ The Arabs, clients of both the Byzantines and the Sasanians,⁵⁵ the Armenians, their kingdom divided between the two empires, and the Turkic khaganates allied themselves with one or other of the three empires, and this arrangement constituted the Eurasian world system of late antiquity.

The Romans and the Sasanians symbolically adopted each other's princes and acknowledged their equality; Khusro II thought of the world being illuminated by two eyes, the kingdom of the Romans and the Sasanian Persians.⁵⁶ For almost a century there had been nominal peace, but things

53 Howard-Johnston, "State and Society in Late Antique Iran," p. 125.

54 Matthew P. Canepa, "Distant Displays of Power: Understanding Cross-Cultural Interaction among the Elites of Rome, Sasanian Iran, and Sui-Tang China," *Ars Orientalis* 38 (2010): 122, 131.

55 For the role of the Arabs at this time, see Greg Fisher, *Between Empires: Arabs, Romans, and Sasanians in Late Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 72–127.

56 Matthew P. Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship between Rome and Sasanian Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), p. 1.

had changed when the Byzantine Phocas had the rightful emperor, Maurice (593–602 CE), assassinated and usurped the throne. Khusro II, who had been under the protection of Maurice during his youth, invaded the Eastern Roman Empire. Meanwhile Heraclius had been proclaimed the new emperor of Byzantium, but the Sasanians did not stop and took over Palestine and Egypt and then laid siege to Constantinople. The True Cross and the Holy Grail were taken back to Iran, which brought shock and despair to Constantinople and Christians throughout the empire. Heraclius was able to strike back and, with the backing of the Church and its funds, invaded the Sasanian Empire. This may be called a proto-Crusade, two decades before the Muslims even came onto the scene of Near Eastern politics. Heraclius promised Heaven to those who would die at war against the Persians and take back the True Cross.⁵⁷ By 628 CE, the Sasanian Empire and its King of Kings, Khusro II, had been defeated and deposed.

From 628 CE to the death of the last Sasanian ruler, Yazdgerd III in 651 CE, the Sasanian Empire was plunged into chaos, with a quick succession of emperors. Finally, the Muslims were able to defeat the Sasanians in three successive battles and fully conquer Iranshahr. A new era in the Near East had begun which was in line with changes in the Eastern Mediterranean. It could be argued that Khusro II, by destroying the old world order where the Romans and Sasanians ruled the Southwest Asian world, had disrupted this binary outlook and balance of power.⁵⁸ Through this disruption the Sasanians, for a short time, attempted to control most of Southwest Asia and turn themselves into an even more formidable Afro-Eurasian power.

The Islamic commonwealth (650–900 CE)

It was in this prevailing world system of late antiquity that Islam appeared, establishing new patterns and allegiances.⁵⁹ The Afro-Eurasian world, engulfed in a bitter conflict in the early seventh century, was soon to be overcome by a new power from the edge of empires. The Prophet Muhammad, who had

57 Yuri Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies of the True Cross: The Sasanian Conquest of Jerusalem in 614 and Byzantine Ideology of Anti-Persian Warfare* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2011), p. 48.

58 James Howard-Johnston, "The Destruction of the Ancient World Order," in Derek Kennet and Paul Luft (eds.), *Current Research in Sasanian Archaeology, Art and History* (Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 79–85.

59 Marshall G. S. Hodgson, "The Role of Islam in World History," in Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History*, ed. Edmund Burke III (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 113.

watched the conflict between the Roman and the Sasanian empires unfold along the Red Sea and Arabia where Christian Ethiopian and Jewish Arab clients fought for dominance for each empire, was poised to step in as the victor.⁶⁰

Geographically, Islam came to existence in a commercial hub, that of Mecca, at the crossroads of the South Arabian trade routes to Syria and the path of connection from east and northeastern Arabia to the Red Sea. Forceful military attacks at Qadisiyya in 637 CE (against Sasanian Persia), Yarmuk in 636 CE (against the Byzantines), and other places spread Islam,⁶¹ but the establishment of the system was largely due to its familiarity and flexibility, emulating the established systems whenever it came into contact with them. The Sasanian and Byzantine administrative systems were left untouched for many decades, and their best parts were even handpicked for creating an “Islamic” system toward the end of the seventh and beginning of the eighth century.

The Umayyads, as the first dynasty of Islam, sometimes called the “last ancient empire,”⁶² came to unite and integrate most of the conquests of Islam, establishing themselves in Damascus where they had pre-Islamic family ties. They, however, acted largely in the spirit of a late antiquity empire, quickly trying to establish a central, authoritarian figure reminiscent of the Byzantine emperor and the Sasanian King of Kings, rather than the hybrid spiritual leader and administrator that Muhammad and his immediate successors (the Caliphs) had been. Despite their obvious abilities in administration, including the creation of an Islamic currency based on a dual gold-silver standard as well as regulating the taxation, the Umayyads proved unable to control the overstretched Islamic Empire. Their failure to pay attention to the disenfranchised eastern provinces, as well as their attempts at isolating the elites of the Islamic society, finally led to their downfall from the edge of the empire in 750 CE.

The new administration, the Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad, achieved power by utilizing the military strength of Central Asia and eastern Iran, the so-called Greater Khorasan, which, since the late Sasanian period, had been on the rise both politically and economically. The disenfranchised segments of the Islamic elite, including the family of the Prophet and the

60 Glen Warren Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

61 Fred M. Donner, “Muhammad and the Caliphate,” in John L. Esposito (ed.), *The Oxford History of Islam* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 12.

62 Eric H. Cline and Mark W. Graham, *Ancient Empires: From Mesopotamia to the Rise of Islam* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 322.

descendants of his closest followers, used this power successfully in order to topple the Umayyads.

The Abbasid Empire established another Afro-Eurasian empire. The extreme west of the empire, the regions of Maghrib and Iberia, were left in the hands of a cadet branch of the Umayyads, while various regions of North Africa never quite submitted to the Abbasid power. The eastern fringes, including the Greater Khorasan (eastern Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan) itself, despite their initial role in assisting the Abbasids to power, slowly moved toward local autonomy. The golden age of the Abbasids, the late eighth and the early ninth centuries, saw the efflorescence of intellectual activity, mostly represented through large-scale translation projects from all the conquered late antique people and empires, namely from Syriac (Near East and Levant), Greek (Byzantine), and Middle Persian (Sasanian). The position of Arabic as the *lingua franca*, essentially ending over 1,500 years of Aramaic role in the same position, was one of the greatest achievements of the stability that came with the Abbasid rise to power. The world of the Eastern Mediterranean, divided among different political powers since the fall of the Seleucid Empire, was once again united under the same power, allowing the exploitation of both commercial and production economies of the region.

The peace established by the Abbasids allowed for a continuation of the economic growth that dates back to the period of late antiquity. The agricultural rise of Syria and its unity with Egypt and Mesopotamia created what is sometimes called a Medieval Green Revolution, signs of which can be seen as far east as Khuzistan and in the adoption of new seeds (cotton, sugar cane, rice) and agricultural methods.⁶³ This agricultural revolution was maintained through the long Near Eastern tradition of water maintenance with irrigation canals feeding to the fields. These canals were constantly looked after, especially in Mesopotamia which was perhaps the richest region in the world.⁶⁴ The prosperity associated with the agricultural growth, as well as the wealth brought in via the trans-Saharan and cotton trade in Iran and Central Asia, was primarily what allowed for the cultural growth of the Abbasid Golden Age.⁶⁵ The Abbasids controlled the caliphate through their

63 Andrew M. Watson, "A Medieval Green Revolution: New Crops and Farming Techniques in the Early Islamic World," in Abraham Udovitch (ed.), *The Islamic Middle East, 700–1900: Studies in Economic and Social History* (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 1981), pp. 29–58.

64 Hugh Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World: The Rise and Fall of Islam's Greatest Dynasty* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2005), p. 131.

65 Richard W. Bulliet, *Cotton, Climate, and Camels in Early Islamic Iran: A Moment in World History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), see chapter 2.

armies composed of *abna al-dawla*, or “sons of the revolution,” who were from Khorasan and now settled at the seat of the power in Baghdad.

This increased prosperity, however, tested the Abbasid administrative abilities and stretched their resources to a maximum. Local administration, taking advantage of occasional weaknesses in the central government, would find reasons to exploit the incoming wealth for gaining local power. This, indeed, was the case for Greater Khorasan, as well as North Africa, Egypt, and even parts of Syria, where local governors quickly managed to gain control of their region. The rise of internal fighting between Arab, Sogdian, Persian, and Turkish soldiers and mercenaries also gave opportunities of individual power grab to the officers and administrators. The Abbasids used the system of *iqta* “fief” as an institution to enable the military men to collect tax revenues from a specific district, while keeping the Baghdad treasury intact. The downside was that the bureaucracy that ran the caliphate was weakened and partially eliminated.⁶⁶ While culturally quite strong and vibrant, the Abbasid Empire at the end of the ninth century was on the brink of political disintegration. The rise of the Tahirids in Khorasan, the Saffarids in Sistan, and the Samanids in Central Asia and Transoxiana, at around 900 CE, brought to an end any semblance of an all-powerful caliph in Baghdad.⁶⁷ As this chapter noted at the beginning, a critical factor in the decline and disintegration of the existing world system may have been climate changes. According to a recent study, the Near East experienced a big chill at the beginning of the tenth century, which led to a decline in agricultural production from which the region did not recover for a long time.⁶⁸

Conclusion

The world of West and Central Asia during the Iron Age and up to the rise of independent states of the Islamic Empire shows an interesting pattern of political, cultural, and economic development. The empires of the Bronze Age were replaced by smaller polities, the result of incoming populations of Arameans and other Semitic tribes, as well as Indo-Iranians. Old states such as Assyria, and for a short while Babylonia, managed to control the situation by forcefully uniting these polities, but they were incapable of checking the cultural change in the region. Aramaic quickly became the common language

66 Donner, “Muhammad and the Caliphate,” p. 30.

67 John Joseph Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 118–19.

68 Bulliet, *Cotton, Climate, and Camels*, see chapter 3 “The Big Chill,” pp. 69–95.

of the Levant, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia, and the vehicle through which the political culture of Assyria and Babylonia was diffused in the incoming Achaemenid Empire. The Iranian language group, of which the Achaemenid mother tongue of Persian was a member, despite the cultural dominance of Elam over the Iranian tribes, itself managed to replace many other languages and become the native tongue of much of the population of the Iranian Plateau and Central Asia. Achaemenid control of Mesopotamia and Syria allowed for the spread of Syro-Mesopotamian culture, the culmination of over 2,000 years of Sumerian, Akkadian, Hittite, and Aramean cultures, to become widespread, all the way from the central highlands of Iran to North Africa.

The entry of Alexander and his Hellenized Macedonians added a new ingredient to this Syro-Mesopotamian culture. Hellenism essentially codified much of the culture of the region and gave it a convenient Greek literary form, the means through which it spread as far east as Bactria and Transoxiana. But Greek, despite its importance, did not manage to topple Aramaic, and the language of the empire of Ashur-banipal, by becoming the language of Christianity, remained the unifying tongue of the region, influencing anything from Middle Persian and Sogdian to Greek itself.

The world of late antiquity, the fragmented world of the post-Hellenistic West Asia and Iran, had a renaissance under the unifying force of Christianity and even influenced the essentially isolationist Zoroastrian religious institutions. Sasanians and Romans, despite all their conflicts, could not live without each other, and they certainly could not ignore each other either. Their efforts in controlling the whole of West Asia dragged them through 400 years of warfare, with fascinating periods of peace. The situation in West Asia was matched, or even surpassed, only by that of Central Asia, where Sasanians tried for many centuries to fully control the remnants of the Bactrian kingdoms of the Macedonians and the Kushans, and unite them with their rule of the Iranian Plateau and Mesopotamia. This was never to be, however, as subsequent waves of nomadic invaders from the steppe proved, depriving the Sasanians of any control in the region toward the late sixth century. The Huns, Hephthalites, and finally the Turks were the important actors from the edge of the sedentary empires.

Islam, the new force of the Near East, finally appears to have achieved the impossible. It dethroned Aramaic as the common and literary language of the region, initially promoting Arabic and eventually Persian in the eastern parts of the empire. It also united both sides of the political divide in the Levant and, for a short while, even managed to unite Central and West Asia. This

was the universalist vision of many of the empires that have been discussed in this chapter. Some, like the Neo-Assyrian, the Achaemenid, and the Seleucids, came close to achieving this vision of Afro-Eurasian expansion, while the Parthians and the Romans and then the Sasanians and Byzantines clashed for the realization of such a dream. Ultimately, it was the nomads from the edges, namely the Arabs from the south and then the Turks from the east, who were able to achieve unification.

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Regional study: Bactria – the crossroads of ancient Eurasia

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The country that the Greeks called Bactria (Bactria) (see Map 11.1) with its double-named capital of Baktra-Zariaspa (modern Balkh) was located on the plain that comprises northern Afghanistan from the Hindu-Kush mountains in the south to the Amudaria (Greek, Oxos) River in the north and west, and the Badakhshan mountains in the east. Archaeologists have divided the country into two regions: an eastern one from the Kunduz River to the Badakhshan mountains and a central one centered on the oases of Baktra and Tashkurgan. Along with the Amudaria, the main rivers of the region – Kokcha, Kunduz, Tashkurgan, Balkh, Sar-i Pul, and Shirin Tagao – served as the chief conduits of trade and commerce with the Indian subcontinent in the south, Central Asia in the north and east, and the Middle East and Mediterranean in the west as well as allowing for agricultural deltaic oasis settlements to flourish.

Stone, Bronze, and Iron ages

Evidence of the earliest inhabitants of northern Afghanistan is dated to the Paleolithic period. Throughout the Stone Age, habitation was restricted to caves at sites like Kara Kamar, Hazar Sum, and Aq Kupruk where the bones of wild animals such as of gazelle, goat, and sheep were found along with tens of thousands of stone tools fashioned into hand axes, scrapers, burins, cores, and points from quartz, limestone, and other materials. By the Mesolithic period at Tashkurgan, Dara-i-Kur, and elsewhere, wheat and sheep indigenous to the region had been domesticated, as had barley and goats that had originated in western Asia. The Neolithic period, as in Egypt, India, and Mesopotamia, was one of food surpluses, which led to specialization and the rise of complex societies and eventually civilization itself. Thus, ceramics were manufactured as were tools such as hoes, celts, and polishers of



Map II.I Bactria (Baktria)

limestone, while steatite bowls found throughout the Iranian Plateau testify to the establishment of long-distance trade networks.¹

During the Bronze Age (c. 3000–1000 BCE), hundreds of desert oasis settlements arose on both sides of the Amudaria. As is the case with earlier periods, much about Baktria's history at this time remains unknown due to the absence of any written record, but what little can be gleaned indicates that it formed part of the Oxos Civilization, or more commonly, the Baktria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC),² which originated in the delta of the Murgab River of modern Turkmenistan in the oasis of Margiana (modern Merv) north of the Kopet Dag range. BMAC encompassed much of Afghanistan and Baluchistan between 2200 and 2000 BCE.³ The inhabitants were sedentary farmers who irrigated their expansive fields to grow wheat and barley, and lived in large oasis towns, such as Sapalli and Dashli in Baktria, with massive towered defensive walls, palaces, temples with fire altars, and private dwellings. BMAC encompasses a range of diverse artifacts of high level, including female statuettes, ceramics, jewelry, seals, silver and gold vessels, ceremonial shaft-hole axes, and bronze tools replete with iconographical features including boars, dragons, and numerous other real and mythical beasts. Throughout this period and in the succeeding Early Iron Age, the economy was based on a symbiosis between pastoralists and agriculturalists, which enabled the sites of Shortugai and later Bala Hissar of Kunduz in northeastern Afghanistan to serve as Indus Civilization centers of trade. The walled city-fortress of Sapalli may have housed as many as 300 residents. Horse riding and spoked wheels also developed at this time, as did long-distance trade with western Asia, the Indus valley, and the Andronovo culture and its variants to the north, facilitated by the domestication of the camel and animal-drawn carts. In the Early Bronze Age, steppe groups of Indo-Iranian speakers began migrating in a series of waves southward into Baktria and the Iranian Plateau, bringing with them their culture, as the presence of their pottery testifies in the settlements and cemeteries of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age, ultimately assimilating with the indigenous

1 For recent overviews, see, e.g., Graeme Barker, *The Agricultural Revolution in Prehistory: Why Did Foragers Become Farmers?* (Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 154–81, and Meredith L. Runion, *The History of Afghanistan* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishers, 2007), pp. 15–19.

2 Discovered by the Soviet archaeologist, Viktor I. Sarianidi, "Issledovanie pamiatnikov Dashlinskogo oazisa," in E. I. Kruglikova (ed.), *Drevniaia Baktriiia*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Nauka Publishing, 1976), p. 71.

3 David W. Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World* (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 421–27.

population. The result was that Central Asia, and in particular Baktria, became the center of a nascent “world system” linking Inner and Outer Eurasia with the Near East, India, and China.⁴

Achaemenid Baktria, sixth to fourth century BCE

The first written references to Baktria occur after its inclusion in the Achaemenid kingdom.⁵ In Darius I's (r. 522–486 BCE) inscriptional lists of *satrapies*, Persian administrative provinces ruled by a governor, or *satrap*, Baktria (Baktrish) appears as the twelfth conjoined with that of another country, Sogdia (Sugda). Sogdia (modern Uzbekistan and Tadjikistan) was situated between two of Central Asia's largest rivers, the Amudaria in the south and the Syrdaria (Greek, Iaxartes) in the north. Its heartland comprised two river valleys: the Zarafshan (Greek, Polytimetos) containing the city of Samarkand (Greek Marakanda), as signified by the ruins of the site of Afrasiab located east of the present-day city, and the Kashka, south of Samarkand and home to numerous settlements including the site of Erkurgan. The satrapy also included the country of Margiana (Margu) in Turkmenistan, an oasis in the Murghab River delta.

Baktria is mentioned as a fully constituted state by the Greek writer Ktesias (c. 400 BCE), a contemporary of the Achaemenids, fragments of whose work was preserved by Diodorus of Sicily in Book 2, wherein he recounts in his Assyrian history the many achievements of Queen Semiramis (Sammuramat, ninth–eighth century BCE): how she aided the Assyrians in capturing the citadel of the Baktrian king Oxyartes, gave birth to Ninyas, son of king Ninos (Shamsi-Adab V [824–811 BCE], biblical Nimrod), collected a force in Baktria, and launched an unsuccessful assault against the Indian king Strabrobates. Elsewhere in Polynaios' *Strategika* (8.26), she is said to have extended the Assyrian kingdom northward to include the Sogdians and the Sakai. Although it is possible to see in these tales the existence by the seventh century BCE of a Baktrian state, no cuneiform evidence survives to lend any support to this notion or even that the Assyrians ever conducted military operations in Baktria, Sogdiana, or India, let alone against the nomadic Sakae in Central Asia. On the other hand, it cannot be ruled out that relations

4 Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills (eds.), *The World System: From Five Hundred Years to Five Thousand* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 82.

5 Muhammad A. Dandamaev, “Media and Achaemenid Iran,” in János Harmatta (ed.), *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia* (Paris: UNESCO, 1994), vol. II, pp. 35–65.

vis-à-vis trade and commerce were established between Baktria and Assyria in the pre-Achaemenid era.

Although it remains doubtful whether Baktria is mentioned in the *Rig Veda*, the *Avesta*, a work containing Zoroastrian scriptures and the *Gathas*, or teachings of the prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster), holds more promise. Zarathustra may have lived as early as the beginning of the first millennium BCE. Even if the religion did not originate in Baktria, then very soon after its creation tradition holds that he made his home there and died in 522 BCE at or near the city of Balkh. The *Avesta* was written during the reign of Cyrus (559–530 BCE) who promoted the religion throughout the Achaemenid empire. By the late sixth century, it was adopted as the official state religion. Essentially, the religion is dualistic, holding that the endless battle for control of the universe is waged between *Ahura-Mazda* (Good) and *Ahriman* (Evil). By following the precepts set forth in the *Avesta*, people can choose to aid *Ahura-Mazda* in his battle. Less certain is the contention held by some that Vishtaspa and Hutaosa, whose names are Avestan, were converts to the religion, thereby making their son and future Achaemenid king, Darius I, a Zoroastrian by birth.⁶

The Persian conquest of Baktria and the nearby countries of Central and South Asia were accomplished by Cyrus II (r. 549–530 BCE) in 545–539 BCE. The events of Cyrus' campaign remain shrouded in uncertainty. Ktesias reports that hostilities between Cyrus and the Baktrians ended when the Baktrians submitted upon learning that the Median king Astyages had adopted Cyrus as his son. Baktrian troops are also mentioned by Herodotus (7.64) and by Aeschylus in *The Persians* as having taken part in Xerxes' failed invasion of Greece (480–479 BCE) under the command of Hystaspes (Vishtaspa), son of Darius I and satrap of Baktria.

The practice of installing a relative of the king as the satrap of Baktria was indicative of Persian hegemony over the region, one that, like the Medes before them, emphasized personal relations between the crown and the local aristocracy rather than the imposition of a formal administrative system. During this period, the amount of land along rivers and canals that was irrigated for cultivation, a practice that began in the Bronze Age, continued to increase, bringing prosperity to the sedentary population. This is reflected in the 360 talents of silver paid annually by the satrapy (Herodotus 3.89) as well as in the growth of settlements in eastern Baktria at Bala Hissar in Kunduz and nearby at Qunsa, Ai Khanoum, and Archi and in the central part of the

6 Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), vol. 11, pp. 7–8, 41, and 68–69.

country at Baktra, Dilberjin, and Altyn Dilyar. In Sogdia the most famous of settlements included Cyreschata (Cyropolis), probably near the modern city of Khojent along the Syrdaria (Iaxartes) marking the northernmost outpost of the kingdom, and Samarkand, where the administrative government of the country was located.⁷ It was to this part of the kingdom that exiles of whole towns from other parts of the Achaemenid realm were sent, the most famous of which included an Egyptian village (Herodotus 4.204) and the Milesian Branchidai clan whom Xerxes had transplanted in 479 BCE (Herodotus 6.10–20), all of whose descendants Alexander massacred (Strabo 11.11.4, 14.1.5; Curtius 7.5.28–35). Evidence of trade is reflected by the circulation of Greek coins from Asia Minor and the subsequent local production of imitative Greek coins, especially the silver tetradrachmas of Athens, while the famed carpet found in a tomb at the nomadic tomb of Pazyryk in Siberia (probably dating from the fourth or third century BCE) passed through this region on its long sojourn northward.⁸ The Persians were perhaps responsible for introducing the Aramaic script as the region's first form of writing that was subsequently used as the basis of written Parthian, Sogdian, Khorezmian, and even Kharosthi in northwest India and other parts of Central Asia until the fourth century CE. The achievement of the Achaemenid rulers due in large part to their Assyrian and Babylonian predecessors, was to administer their expansive kingdom with the flexibility of enabling peace and prosperity to flourish for some two centuries.⁹

Hellenistic Baktria, fourth to mid-second century BCE

During Alexander the Great's campaign in Persia, a relative of the Persian king, Darius III Commodanus (r. 336–330 BCE), and satrap of Baktria-Sogdia, Bessos, commanded the Baktrian cavalry at the Battle of Gaugamela (331 BCE). After the Persian defeat, Bessos had Darius murdered and fled to Baktria with his followers where he assumed the royal title and name of Artaxerxes IV as well as command over the army. In pursuit of the usurper, Alexander crossed the Hindu-Kush and quickly subdued Baktria. With the

7 W. J. Vogelsang, *The Rise and Organization of the Achaemenid Empire: The Eastern Iranian Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), vol. 111, pp. 267–84 and 287–93.

8 Sergei I. Rudenko, *Frozen Tombs of Siberia: The Pazyryk Burials of Iron Age Horsemen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 298–310.

9 Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, trans. P. T. Daniels (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), pp. 873–76, and Josef Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia from 550 BC to 650 AD*, trans. A. Azodi (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996), pp. 66–101.

Macedonians in control of Baktria, Alexander went into Sogdia in pursuit of Bessos. It was here that Alexander encountered a resistance composed of shifting alliances between regional Baktrian and Sogdian rulers and nomadic Saka tribesmen. Bessos was subsequently arrested in Sogdia by his supporters and surrendered to Alexander who sentenced him to death and proclaimed himself as Darius' true successor (Arrian 3.8.3ff.; Curtius 4.6.2ff.). Throughout his Central Asian campaign (329–327 BCE), Alexander used Baktria as the base of his operations before departing to India. Sogdia in particular proved difficult to subdue. While Alexander was preoccupied with founding a series of towns and fortresses on the Syrdaria, including Alexandria Eschate, and was battling Saka tribes on the other side of the river in Ferghana, Bessos' successor Spitamenes with a force of other Sakai massacred a Macedonian force outside Marakanda on the Polytimetos River. Alexander spent almost the next two years reducing Sogdia and Margiana, throughout which he founded cities and fortresses, settling in them veterans from his army, and enlisted conscripts and took hostages to serve in the army. Spitamenes was subsequently killed by his allies the Massegetai, who sued for peace. His daughter, Apame, later married Seleukos I Nikator (r. with title of king, 305–281 BCE) in Susa (324 BCE), a Macedonian general and founder of the Seleukid kingdom, and mother of Antiochos I (r. 281–261 BCE, as co-ruler from 292). The last major event of the campaign involved an act of diplomacy when Alexander married Rhoxane (Roshanak), the daughter of the Baktrian nobleman Oxyartes, in 327 BCE (Arrian 4.18.ff.; Curtius 8.4.ff.).¹⁰

When Alexander departed for India, he left behind more than 13,000 veterans installed in various settlements throughout Baktria and Central Asia. Although numerous sites have been excavated, there has yet to be found even one with an inscription bearing its ancient name, including those believed to have been founded by Alexander, so their identities remain largely conjectural.¹¹ By the time of Alexander's death in 323 BCE, the local peoples, whom he had appointed as administrators, were replaced by Greeks and Macedonians. The intervening years between Alexander's departure (327 BCE) and the reconquest of the region by Seleukos I (c. 306 BCE) is unknown, save the few names of its satraps, Amyntas, Philippos, Stasanor, and eventually its last, Diodotos I. Twice the veterans assigned to remain in the

¹⁰ For a concise overview of Alexander's campaign in Iran, see E. Badian, "Alexander in Iran," in Ilya Gershevitch (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), vol. 11, pp. 420–501.

¹¹ E.g. Peter M. Fraser, *Cities of Alexander the Great* (Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 102–70.

country rebelled, longing to return home, and they were joined by the local population desirous of independence.¹²

Under the Seleucids (c. 306–248/7 BCE), Macedonian authority was once again reasserted in Central Asia. Seleukos I renamed Margiana Seleuceia, which upon his death was refounded as Antiocheia after Antiochos I and its walls enlarged to some 250 kilometers. Seleukos entered into diplomatic relations with the Mauryan Dynasty (c. 324–180 BCE) of India in c. 305 BCE when he signed over to Chandragupta (Greek, Sandrakottas, r. c. 324–301 BCE) all claims to any land south of the Hindu-Kush in exchange for a treaty of peace allowing Seleukos to retain his possessions of Margiana, Baktria, and Sogdia north of the Hindu-Kush as well as 500 war elephants. The two likewise exchanged ambassadors, with Megasthenes serving as the Seleucid representative. Seleucid authority over the region created a semblance of cultural homogeneity by making Greek *koine* the kingdom's lingua franca, introducing a formal currency, and establishing long-distance trade networks stretching from the Mediterranean to Central and South Asia as well as encouraging an influx of colonists who settled throughout Asia.¹³

During the reign of Antiochos II (261–246 BCE), the Seleucid kingdom weakened, allowing the satrap of Parthia, Andragoras, to assert his independence. Shortly afterward, in c. 248/7 BCE, he was overthrown by Arsakes I, the leader of the nomadic Parni, at about the same time that the satrap of Baktria, Diodotos I, likewise formed his own kingdom. It was perhaps in this period that Margiana fell under Arsakid control. Not until some four decades later, in 208 BCE, did Antiochos III (222–187 BCE) attempt to reassert Seleucid control over both countries. Although he enjoyed success in Parthia, Baktria proved more formidable. By the time of his arrival, the kingdom of Baktria had passed to Euthydemos I (c. 220–190 BCE) who had overthrown Diodotos II, the founder's son (Justin 41.4.9). For two years (208–206 BCE), Euthydemos withstood a siege at his capital of Baktra, until finally Antiochos agreed to a peace. Euthydemos retained his kingdom and formed an alliance with the Seleucid, the negotiations of which were conducted by Demetrios I, Euthydemos' son. When all was settled, Antiochos departed for Syria by way of India and the Persian Gulf, while Euthydemos remained in sole possession of his kingdom of Baktria and Sogdia (Polybios 11.39.1–10).

12 G. A. Koshelenko, "Vostanie grekov v Baktrii i Sogdiane 323 g. do n.e. i nekotorye aspekty grecheskoi politicheskoi mysli IV v. do n.e.," *Vestnik drevnei istorii* 119 (1972): 72–78.

13 Susan Sherwin-White and Amélie Kuhrt, *From Samarkand to Sardis: A New Approach to the Seleucid Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 91–113.

The history of ancient Baktria is marked by an almost complete dearth of written testimony. Aside from coins the next largest source of information we possess about Hellenistic Baktria comes by way of archaeological finds, much of which was accumulated between the 1950s and 1970s with very little afterward due to the tragic wars that continue to plague Afghanistan. The best-known settlement of Hellenistic Baktria is the city of Ai Khanoum, which probably won formal recognition as either a *polis* or a *politeuma* during the co-regency of Seleukos I and Antiochos I (292–282/I BCE). Its founder was a certain Kineas who no doubt served as the royal *epistates*. During the Greek-Baktrian period, the city grew in stature and importance. Located at the confluence of the Kokcha and Piandj, it was built on a hill and thus divided into two sections, an acropolis and at its base the city proper, which was protected by an imposing wall more than 30 feet high and up to 26 feet thick interspersed with towers. The main gate opened onto an avenue that ran the length of the city, along which one gained access to a theater with seating for 5,000, an arsenal, a *gymnasium* dedicated to Herakles, a *temenos* dedicated to Kineas, and a *propylaeum* that led to a royal palace with a treasury, library, private apartments, and storerooms.¹⁴ Judging by the finds from the site's excavations, the merchants of Ai Khanoum, undoubtedly like those in other cities of Greek Baktria, were involved with long-distance trade networks centered principally with Parthian and Seleucid Iran and India, while contact with China and the Mediterranean and Black seas was less regular.

The death of King Ashoka (c. 272/268–232 BCE), grandson of Chandragupta, signaled the decline of the Maurya realm. By 180 BCE the Mauryas had been replaced by another Indian dynasty, the Sungas, while political chaos reigned throughout much of northern India up to the Hindu-Kush. What little understanding we have of this period derives chiefly from the coins minted by the successors of Euthydemos I north and south of the Hindu-Kush. Although their chronology and precise genealogical relations remain tentative, the major figures of this period are reduced to a small number of sovereigns – Demetrios I, Euthydemos II, Antimachos I, Agathokles, Pantaleon, Apollodotos I, Antimachos II, Demetrios II, and Menander – who were responsible for setting in motion the events of the ensuing two centuries.

14 For an overview of the site, see Cl. Rapin, "Greeks in Afghanistan: Ai Khanoum," in Jean-Paul Descœudres (ed.), *Greek Colonists and Native Populations* (Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 329–42; and Paul Bernard, "The Greek Colony at Ai Khanoum and Hellenism in Central Asia; Ai Khanoum Catalog," in Fredrik T. Hiebert and Pierre Cambon (eds.), *Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul* (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2008), pp. 81–130.

According to Strabo (15.1.27), Demetrios I invaded the lands south of the Hindu-Kush and portions of the Indian subcontinent, perhaps as far as Pataliputra (Patna, India). More than thirty kings, who ruled various principalities between southern Afghanistan and northwest India and created an array of dynastic entities, owed their position to the Euthydemids. Collectively, they are referred to as the Indo-Greeks, while those whose reigns are primarily associated with areas north of the Hindu-Kush are termed the Greek Baktrians, or Graeco-Baktrians. The Indo-Greek kingdoms are most often associated with Alexandria in the Paropamisadai (modern Begram), Taxila in the western Punjab, and Pushkalavati (modern Charsada, Pakistan). When Demetrios I returned to Baktria he was overthrown by a new claimant to the throne, Eukratides I. He quickly dispatched other members of the Euthydemid house in Baktria and established his own dynasty that would last only through the lifetime of his sons: Eukratides II, Platon, and Heliokles I. With his affairs in order, Eukratides I attempted to enlarge his kingdom by reestablishing Baktrian authority over the Indian lands held by the Indo-Greeks to the south. It seems that what success he enjoyed was short-lived, as he found himself pitted against the Indo-Greek king Menander, who was able to offer formidable opposition. In any event, Eukratides I soon decided to return home, but along the way he was murdered by one of his sons. For his part, Menander appears to have enjoyed a long reign. He seems to have ruled from Sagala (modern Sialkot, Pakistan) in the northern Punjab. Menander's kingdom extended from Barygaza in the west to Magadah in the Ganges valley. He is one of only a handful of kings to be mentioned by both classical authors (e.g., Strabo 11.1.1) and Indian authors, notably by the anonymous writer of the Buddhist work, *Milindapañha* (The Questions of King Menander), which portrays him as a convert and patron of the religion. The last Indo-Greek sovereigns are believed to have been Strato III, whose coins place him in the eastern Punjab in c. 20 CE, and a certain Theodamas of Gandhara (modern Pakistan), known only from a signet ring bearing his name and royal title written in the Indian script of Kharoshthi dated to the first century CE. Both are regarded as casualties of the invading nomadic Indo-Scythians.¹⁵

15 The bibliography on the history of the Hellenistic Far East is disparate. In recent years, a variety of publications have been produced encompassing a wide range of scholars approaching the subject from different traditions, e.g. Elizabeth Errington and Joe Cribb (eds.), *The Crossroads of Asia: Transformation in Image and Symbol* (Cambridge: Ancient India and Iran Trust, 1992); and Joe Cribb and Georgina Herrmann (eds.), *After Alexander: Central Asia before Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

The Indo-Greeks never achieved a unified kingdom as they constantly warred with Greek Baktrians, feuded with each other, or battled competing nomadic groups, notably the Indo-Scythians, the Indo-Parthians, and the Yuezhi. The last known descendants of the Indo-Greeks, the so-called Greek-Indians of the western Deccan, were perhaps merchants and appear in a series of Prakrit and Sanskrit inscriptions as Buddhist donors of various rock-cut Buddhist cave temples in the mid-third century CE.¹⁶ The Indo-Greek heritage was culturally significant. As early as the mid-third century BCE, Ashoka inscribed his Buddhist bilingual inscriptions in Kandahar in Greek and Aramaic; the latter was retained as an administrative language that had been used by the Achaemenids. The skill of the Greek translators reveals their intimate understanding of both Buddhism and Greek philosophy even at this early period. The Greek language, long after the Indo-Greeks themselves had constituted a potent political power, was adopted by their successors, like the Parthians, Scythians, and Kushans, as indicated by their coins and inscriptions. Even after the Greek language had become extinct in the second century CE, the Greek script was adopted by the Kushans for writing in their language of Baktrian and remained in use until the Arabic conquests in the ninth century CE. For their part, the Indo-Greeks by the second century BCE were using the language of their subjects, as their bilingual coins of Greek and Prakrit written in either the Brahmi or the Kharoshthi script testify.¹⁷ Besides Buddhism, the Indo-Greeks, like Heliodoros, the ambassador of Antialkidas, converted to Hinduism. In the first century CE, Hellenistic artists from Baktria and India as well as from the Mediterranean world had fused the conventions of classical art with the Indian artistic traditions of Buddhism to fashion the Gandhara style, such as those depicting images of the standing Buddha. Corinthian columns along with the architectural use of the capital formed part of the decorative repertoire of Baktrian and Gandharan art. The identities of Buddhist, Greek, and Indian deities became fused, as with Herakles and Vajrapani. By the fifth century CE, Hellenistic arts had become

16 J. D. Lerner, "The Greek-Indians of Western India: A Study of the Yavana and Yonaka Buddhist Cave Temple Inscriptions," *The International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 1 (1999): 83–109.

17 For an overview of the legacy of the Greeks and their language, see János Harmatta, "Languages and Scripts in Graeco-Bactria and the Saka Kingdom," in Harmatta (ed.), *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia*, vol. 11, pp. 397–416; and Stanley M. Burstein, "New Light on the Fate of Greek in Ancient Central and South Asia," *Ancient West and East* 9 (2010): 181–92.

so firmly part of Buddhist iconography that it spread well beyond Baktria to Central Asia and even China.¹⁸

Nomadic hegemony of Baktria, mid-second century BCE to first century CE

The history of this period is generally viewed as an interlude marking the transition from the end of Greek rule to the beginning of the Kushan Empire. Much of our knowledge derives from the narrative of Zhang Qian, the ambassador from Han China in the mid-second century BCE, which comprises chapter 123 of the *Shiji*, *The Records of the Grand Historian*, composed in 109–91 BCE. He reports that the tribal confederacy of the Xiongnu (perhaps subsequently known as the Huns of Europe and the Hunas of India)¹⁹ defeated the Yuezhi in the Xinjiang and Gansu provinces, forcing them to move first westward to the Ili River valley along the southern shore of Issyk Kul, then again southwestward through the Ferghana valley (modern Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan). From there they conquered Daxia (Baktria) in the south, but settled north of the Gui (the Chinese name for the Amudaria or Oxos River) in Sogdia where their king would eventually establish his capital in the town of Jianshi. During their migration from the Issyk Kul region to Daxia, the Yuezhi displaced a group of Saka tribes (Sai-wang) whom the Yuezhi subsequently followed southward when they, too, were forced to quit the region. Together both groups are identified with the nomads who invaded Greek Baktria in the mid-second century BCE. It is a more difficult task to equate these tribes with those mentioned by the classical authors Apollodoros – Asioi, Pasianoi, Tocharoi, and Sakarauloi (Strabo 11.82) – and Trogus – Saraucae and Asiani (Justin, *Prologi* 41 and 42) – as being responsible for the conquest of Baktria. The problem of identifying the Yuezhi is that it intersects history and language, since they may have spoken the *centum* Indo-European language variant of Tokharian. Long after their empire disappeared, however, the name survived in the form of Tokharistan, which comprised eastern Baktria and Badakhshan. Sogdia in this period was divided into two spheres, with the Yuezhi occupying the

18 B. K. Kaul Deambi, *History and Culture of Ancient Gandhara and the Western Himalayas from Sarada and Epigraphic Sources* (New Delhi: Ariana Publishing House, 1985); and W. J. Vogelsang, "Acculturation in Ancient Gandhara," *South Asian Studies* 4 (1998): 103–13.

19 Most recently asserted by Étienne de la Vaissière, "Huns et Xiongnu," *Central Asiatic Journal* 49 (2005): 3–26; for the contrary view, Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present* (Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 404–405.

southern portion of the country up to the Hissar range, while the northern section fell under the sway of the nomadic state of Kangju centered on the middle course of the Syrdaria, consisting of a loose federation of small principalities (*Hanshu*, 96A.3894).²⁰

The difficulty of reconstructing the history of this period is due to a dearth of literary sources, while the interpretation of this period's material culture has given way to more questions than answers. Thus, there has yet to be found any Baktrian city, including Ai Khanoum, that had suffered a nomadic onslaught.²¹ It is possible that the Sakas entered Baktria in the extreme eastern and western sections of the country but did not conquer it, as that task was left to the Yuezhi. Two Arsakid kings, Phraates II in c. 128 BCE and then Artabanos II in c. 123 BCE, died fighting the Sakai when they invaded western Baktria and eastern Iran. Another Arsakid king, Mithridates II (c. 123–87 BCE), affected a peace with the Sakai and, in return for acknowledging his authority, they were permitted to remain in the eastern Iranian district of Seistan. Subsequently, an amalgam of Sakai and Parthians ruled various regions from Seistan across southern Afghanistan to northwest India at the expense of the smaller and less powerful Indo-Greek domains. The Sakai who passed through eastern Baktria had, in the first half of the first century BCE under Maues, established a kingdom in northwestern India.²²

The events that led to the downfall of Greek Baktria indicate that politically there may have been dramatic changes, but those changes are not reflected in the material culture. Zhang Qian's description of Daxia under the hegemony of the Yuezhi indicates that the country thrived economically. He marveled that merchants returned from India laden with goods from as far away as his native China. He regarded the inhabitants of the Daxia to be poor in the use of arms and afraid of battle, but clever at commerce. The Baktrian site of Tillya-tepe dating from the first century CE – based on a coin of the Roman emperor Tiberius found in one of the graves – serves as a kind of time capsule of the ancient world at the dawn of the Silk Roads. More than 20,000 objects were recovered from six graves of a nomadic family. They demonstrate that the tastes of nomadic peoples and their sense of refinement were far more cultivated than previously thought. The inventory of artifacts

20 For a concise overview, consult Craig Benjamin, "The Origin of the Yüeh-chih," in Craig Benjamin and Samuel N. C. Lieu (eds.), *Walls and Frontiers in Inner Asian History* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 131–51.

21 Gérard Fussman, "Southern Bactria and Northern India before Islam: A Review of Archaeological Reports," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116 (1996): 247.

22 A. K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks* (Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 133–64.

displays a wide-ranging admixture of styles, including Chinese, Greek, Indian, Iranian, Roman, and Siberian.²³ Politically, the once mighty Greek Baktrian sovereigns were replaced by small, local principalities in places such as Ai Khanoum. Rather than destroying the cities that they had subjugated, the Yuezhi exacted tribute from them, much as the Scythians had done for centuries to the Greek *poleis* of the Black Sea. If the treasury at Ai Khanoum is any indication, the tribute that these principalities paid was in the form of silver derived from Indo-Greek and Indian punch-marked coins. This resulted in a peaceful coexistence between conquered and ruled. Even the last Greek king of Baktria, Heliokles I (r. c. 125–90 BCE), seems to have enjoyed a long reign,²⁴ although he presided over a greatly diminished kingdom perhaps from his capital of Baktra. This milieu changed only when the trading network south of the Hindu-Kush collapsed because of the depletion in the supply of the silver. Without it no Baktrian city was able to pay the Yuezhi tribute and thus was unable to trade with them. The result was chaos among the five ruling clans of the Yuezhi who must have competed among themselves for a swiftly disappearing share of silver. It may well have been this event that propelled the Yuezhi to cross the Oxos into Baktria in search of new sources of revenue in the mid-first century BCE.²⁵

Kushan Baktria, first to fourth century CE

It is generally agreed that the Kushans were one of the five tribes of the Yuezhi, among whom some probably spoke Tokharian, mentioned by the Chinese sources.²⁶ According to the *Hou Hanshu* (Annals of the Later Han Dynasty), based on the report submitted by the Chinese general Ban Yong in c. 125 CE, after the Yuezhi had settled down north of the Amudaria and had made Jianshi their capital, Daxia (Baktria) was divided into five *hsi hou* or

23 Viktor I. Sarianidi, "Ancient Bactria's Golden Hoard," in Hiebert and Cambon (eds.), *Afghanistan*, pp. 211–18; and V. Schlitz, "Tillya Tepe, the Hill of Gold: A Nomad Necropolis" and "Tillya Tepe Catalog," in Hiebert and Cambon (eds.), *Afghanistan*, pp. 219–95.

24 Joe Cribb, "The Greek Kingdom of Bactria, its Coinage and its Collapse," in Osmund Bopearachchi and Marie-François Boussac (eds.), *Afghanistan, ancien carrefour entre l'Est et l'Ouest: Actes du colloque international au Musée archéologique Henri-Prades-Lattes du 5 au 7 mai 2003* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp. 212–14.

25 J. D. Lerner, "Revising the Chronologies of the Hellenistic Colonies of Samrakand-Marakanda (Afrasiab II-III) and Ai Khanoum (northeastern Afghanistan)," *Anabasis: Studia Classica et Orientalia* 1 (2010): 58–79.

26 Jamsheed Choksy, "The Enigmatic Origins of the Tokharians," in Carlo G. Cereti and Farrokh Vajifdar (eds.), *Ataš-e Dorun: The Fire Within* (San Diego: 1st Books Library, 2003), pp. 107–19.

yabghu (tribal princedoms), perhaps corresponding to the five tribes that constituted the confederacy. After a lapse of more than a century, a certain Qiujiuque (Kujula Kadphises), from the *yabghu* of Guishuang, became king of the Yuezhi and established the kingdom of Guishuang (Kushan) in the mid-first century CE. He invaded Anxi (Indo-Parthia), captured Gaofu (Kabul), and conquered Puda (Paktiya) and Jibin (Gandhara). He was more than 80 years old when he died and was succeeded by his son Yangaozhen (Vima Takto), who subjugated Tianzhu (India) and appointed a general(s) to administer it. To the north of the Kushan kingdom was another called Kangju, situated on both sides of the Syrdaria. Zhang Qian in c. 128 BCE called it a nation of nomads who recognized the authority of the Yuezhi to the south and the Xiongnu to the east. By the second century CE, it had incorporated a significant portion of northern Sogdia, Dayuan (Ferghana), and Yancai between the northern shore of the Aral Sea and the Caspian Sea, thereby controlling an important segment of the northern route of the Silk Roads. It is difficult to know to what degree the Kushans abandoned their pastoral heritage in favor of a more sedentary lifestyle, like the Achaemenids and many others before them. The archaeological record indicates that under Yuezhi hegemony and their Kushan successors, the amount of land brought under irrigation for cities and farms substantially increased, suggesting that the populations of Bactria and Sogdia not only grew but flourished and prospered, while graves attributed to the Yuezhi and early Kushans contain a richer panoply of goods than in previous periods.²⁷

Thanks to the Rabatak inscription,²⁸ the genealogy of the Kushan kings is known from Kujula Kadphises to Kanishka I. Thus, toward the end of the first century CE, the reign of Vima Takto's son and successor, Vima Kadphises, marks the period of the "Great Kushans," beginning with his reign in the first century CE to those of his successors Vasishka I, Huvishka, and Vasudeva I in the third century CE. He minted the first gold coins (dinar) of the kingdom and initiated a heavier bronze coinage (tetradrachma). The Kushans gained control of the southern branch of the Silk Roads at the Indian port of Barygaza (modern Broach), thereby establishing direct mercantile relations with Roman Egypt and indirectly with the Mediterranean world at the expense of the Iranian kingdom of Parthia. He, in turn, was succeeded by the most famous and yet enigmatic of the Kushan rulers, Kanishka I, who is

27 Craig Benjamin, *The Yuezhi: Origin, Migration and the Conquest of Northern Bactria*, Silk Road Studies 14 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 184–215.

28 Nicholas Sims-Williams, "The Bactrian Inscription of Rabatak: A New Reading," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 18 (2004): 53–68.

known primarily from legends, coins, and inscriptions. Although he is credited with founding various Buddhist monuments, such as stupas that housed reliquaries, he may not have been a convert, since he is associated with a number of religions that are primarily Iranian in nature, and to a lesser extent Greek and Indian. Judging by his coin legends and inscriptions, he introduced Baktrian as the official language written in a modified Greek script at the expense of the former universal languages of Aramaic and Greek. For example, the stem of the Greek P (*rho*) was elongated to form P (*sho*), creating the sound “sh.” Kanishka also inaugurated a new era beginning with the first year of his reign and thus presumably ending the era initiated by the Indo-Scythian king Azes I in 58 BCE. He presided over his kingdom from the capitals of Purushapura (modern Peshawar) near the Khyber Pass, Mathura in northern India on the banks of the Yamuna River, and the Baktrian summer capital at Kapisa (perhaps Alexandria ad Caucasum, now Begram) in the heart of the Kushan kingdom. Like other Kushan kings, Kanishka adopted the title of *devaputra* (son of the god(s)), perhaps modeled on the imperial Roman title of *divi filius* or the Chinese regal notion of *tianzi* (son of heaven). This may explain why a Chinese traveler in the third century could remark that the world is divided into three spheres, each ruled by a “son of heaven”: China, the Kushan, and Rome.²⁹

Kanishka's reign also marks the largest extent of the Kushan kingdom, from bordering the state of Kangju in the north on the banks of the Aral Sea southward encompassing significant portions of contemporary Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and northern India up to the city of Varanasi (Benares) on the Ganges River and in the east at Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh. If the resemblance between the frieze of *putti* in the Gandharan style frescoes at Miran and the frieze on the Kanishka casket from Peshawar are contemporary, then both works were produced during his lifetime. Kanishka might well have been responsible for expanding Kushana authority not only at Miran but also at the oasis cities of Kashgar, Yarkand, and Khotan in the Tarim Basin. He may well have enabled Buddhist pilgrims to travel in safety for a considerable length on the road to China, bringing with them Gandhara art and the Kharoshthi script. The name of the last of the Great Kushans, Vasudeva I, exhibits that not only was he a worshipper of the Hindu god Vishnu, but also the ethnic identity of the

29 Harold Walter Bailey, “A Kharoṣṭhi Inscription of Senavarma, King of Oḍi,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1980): 23; and Boris J. Staviskij, *La Bactriane sous les Kushans: Problèmes d'histoire et de culture*, trans. Paul Bernard, M. Burda, Frantz Grenet, and P. Leriche (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1986), p. 29.

dynasty itself was increasingly becoming Indian. His reign of some thirty years was the last in the line of Kushan rulers to enjoy peace and prosperity, as his successors would give way to new powers that arose from within and without the kingdom. The period of the reigns of the “great” kings was followed by those of lesser kings, the last of whom held onto power in small principalities in northwest India.

Under the Kushans, Baktria became the international hub of the “Silk Roads” where people throughout Eurasia traveled bringing goods and ideas on their way to China, India, Parthia, or Rome. Such was the undertaking of a certain Macedonian merchant named Maes Titianos in the first or second century CE, whose information about the lands from Central Asia to China was noted by the geographer Claudius Ptolemy (1.11.7), which he had obtained from his predecessor the geographer Marinus of Tyre. This is the period when in Central Asia, and particularly in Baktria, such disparate religious and philosophical traditions as Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Daoism, Hellenism, Hinduism, Manichaeism, and Zoroastrianism, to name but a few, encountered one another. By the second century CE, diplomatic relations between the Kushans and Rome appear to have become more frequent. Augustus had received an embassy from “India” during his reign, followed by others in the reigns of Trajan, Hadrian, and Antoninus Pius. As early as the reign of Kujula Kadphises in the first century CE, some of his copper coins represent the king on a curule chair similar to the one that appears on Claudius’ coins, while the obverse of others bears a portrait strikingly similar to those on the silver denarii of Augustus and Tiberius. Vima Kadphises’ gold coins approximate the same weight standard that was employed in producing Roman aurei. In the first and second century CE, the Kushan extension into Central Asia resulted in joint Chinese and Kushan military operations against nomads who mounted raids against merchants on the myriad trade routes and oasis settlements between both countries as well as the exchange of diplomatic gifts between the Kushans and the Han. Kushan gold coins, though initially intended for trade with the Mediterranean world and India, had the unintended consequences of becoming the accepted, universal currency of the Silk Roads.³⁰ Although military confrontation between the two powers occasionally erupted, it appears not to have been serious, as early in the second century Kanishka was able to

30 The classic work on the Silk Roads remains Manfred G. Raschke, “New Studies in Roman Commerce with the East,” in Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (eds.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1978), pp. 604–1378.

found a kingdom at Kashgar in Xinjiang that incorporated the former Chinese dependencies of Khotan and Yarkand. This marked the formal introduction of the Brahmi script into Central Asia. Kushan Buddhist missionaries were likewise active at the Chinese capitals of Loyang and Nanjing.³¹

Kushan coins also reflect this eclectic mix with a pantheon that consists of Iranian steppe, Hellenistic, and Hindu deities alongside those associated with Buddhism, Jainism, and Zoroastrianism.³² One of the chief beneficiaries of the Silk Roads was Buddhism, whose monks from Parthia and Margiana, Baktria and India followed in the footsteps of merchants as they traveled from India through Central Asia to China by the second century CE. According to the Sarvastivada tradition of Mahayana Buddhism, Kanishka I convened the fourth great Buddhist Council, probably in the Gandharan region of Kashmir, to establish treatises on Buddhist canonical texts.³³ Other Buddhist literary achievements ascribed to Kanishka's reign include works such as Ashvaghosha's, *Buddhacarita*, or life of the Buddha; tradition has Ashvaghosha acting as Kanishka's personal spiritual advisor in all matters related to Buddhism. By the fifth and sixth centuries, Buddhism had become the established religion throughout Central Asia.³⁴

In addition to trade, Kushan prosperity rested on the tradition of supervising workers from village and city to build and maintain large- and small-scale irrigation complexes, particularly those along the Zerafshan, Syrdaria, and Amudaria rivers. New technologies in agriculture, such as the widespread adoption of iron, led to increased productivity, as did a greater diversity of crops, such as cereals, fruits, cotton, and poppy, while wine was now produced as far north as Khorezm and Margiana in the west in sufficient quantities for export, while Ferghana became renowned for its horse-breeding activities.

The term "Kushan art" really represents distinct artistic regions under Kushan domination that over time came to reflect common themes, ideas, and representations rather than a uniform style. Two of the most famous

31 John E. Hill, *Through the Jade Gate to Rome: A Study of the Silk Routes during the Later Han Dynasty 1st to 2nd centuries CE: An Annotated Translation of the Chronicle on the "Western Regions" in the Hou Hanshu* (Charleston, SC: BookSurge Publishing, 2009).

32 Martha L. Carter, "Kanishka's Bactrian Pantheon in the Rabatak Inscription: the Numismatic Evidence," in Antonio Panaino and Andrea Piras (eds.), *Proceedings of the Fifth Conference of the Societas Iranologica Europaea Held in Ravenna, 6–11 October 2003* (Milano: Mimesis, 2006), vol. 1, pp. 351–56.

33 Erich Frauwallner, "Die buddhistischen Konzile," *Zeitschriften der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 102 (1952): 240–61.

34 Xinru Liu, *Ancient India and Ancient China: Trade and Religious Exchanges, AD 1–600* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

schools were Gandhara in the Pakistani Punjab and Mathura in northwest India. In the Kushan period Buddha at this time was portrayed in human form, whereas previously he had been abstracted as footsteps or a lotus. The Gandhara school was influenced by Hellenistic art, and its artists are noted for their depictions of the Buddha's image, which appears Apollo-like, and episodes connected with his life rendered in a mixture of stucco and grayish schist stone. Further south at the Buddhist center of Hadda in Gandhara, numerous objects associated with Buddhism, such as statues, paintings, stupas, and assorted other monuments, exhibit a brand of Gandhara art that combined Baktrian, Hellenistic, and South Asian styles. The Mathura school concentrated on scenes depicting everyday life and drew from local folk deities. The artists thus created idealized images of the female and male form as well as representations of the Hindu and Buddhist pantheon. Mathura sculpture is readily identifiable by the use of mottled red sandstone. Further north in Baktria, Kushan urban architecture at sites like Baktra, Dilberjin, and Dalverzin-tepe replaced the older Greek plan: cities became rectangular and were built emphasizing new defensive techniques, such that city walls became taller and wider with towers and walkways. The Corinthian capital was transformed into a garden in which lion griffins or zebu bulls roamed or served as the setting of a meditating Buddha. Greek temples gave way to Kushan dynastic cults, while in large urban areas such as Surkh Kotal and Termez, Buddhist monasteries, stupas, and viharas arose as Buddhism began spreading beyond Baktria proper to where missionaries adapted the religion to meet the spiritual needs of its Central Asian converts. The Kushan palace at the summer capital of Begram yielded two rooms filled with an array of items from countries that participated in the trade and commerce of the Silk Roads: Chinese lacquer boxes, bronze Hellenistic statuettes, Roman glass, Indian ivory carvings.³⁵

Baktria from the Sasanians to the Hephthalites, c. 250 CE to 550 CE

The downfall of the Kushan kingdom was the result of the eastern expansion of the Sasanian empire (224–650 CE) of Iran by its founder, Ardashir I (c. 224–240 CE). By c. 230 CE he had conquered Parthia and seized Margiana,

35 G. A. Pugachenkova, S. R. Dar, R. C. Sharma, and M. A. Joyenda, "Kushan Art," in Harmatta (ed.), *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia*, vol. 11, pp. 331–95; and Suman Mathur, *Art and Culture under the Kushans* (Delhi: Bharatiya Kala Prakashan, 1998).

Baktria, and Sogdiana from the Kushans in an attempt to re-establish a second Achaemenid kingdom. Under his son, Shapur I (242–272 CE), the western portion of the Kushan kingdom was further reduced when Gandhara fell under his authority. Judging by their coins minted at Balkh and at another possibly in the Kabul valley, a Sasanian governate consisting of fewer than a dozen individuals was installed bearing the title of Kushanshah, “King of the Kushans,” until c. 350 CE.³⁶ That year marks the beginning of an obscure period in the history of Baktria as a new series of eastern tribes of mixed Iranian and Hunnish (Chinese, Xiongnu) descent overran the Kushano-Sasanian kingdom at the same time as the Huns in the west were invading Europe.³⁷

The first to do so were the Chionites who subdued Transoxiana and Baktria and eventually became allies of the Sasanian king Shapur II (309–379 CE).³⁸ According to the Greek historian Ammianus Marcellinus (16.9–19.2), by 358 CE they aided their Persian ally against the Roman emperor Constantius II (317–361 CE) during the siege of Amida whereat the son of the Chionite king Grumbates was killed. The Kidarites, from Kidara the dynasty’s founder, ruled an empire that stretched from a portion of Sogdiana, through Tokharistan to Gandhāra, beginning at some point between 380 and 430 CE. They, in turn, were followed by the Hephthalites, or White Huns (Procopius, *Persian Wars* 1.3.1–7), who emerge as the dominant power in the mid-fifth century CE following their successive victories over the Sasanian emperor Peroz (457–484 CE). Their successes allowed them to rule over Central Asia, Korasan, and Afghanistan. Since they adopted Baktrian as their administrative language, nothing is known of their own language. The Hephthalites retained the heavily influenced Sasanian culture of Baktria and allowed Buddhism to be freely practiced in the areas that they conquered. Yet the six and seventh centuries mark the decline of Buddhism not only in Baktria but also in the countries to north and south of it as the religion gave ground to a revitalized Hinduism from India and an expanding Islam from Iran.

Hephthalite power abruptly ended with their defeat by the combined forces of the Sasanian king Kosrow I Anoshirvan (531–579) and an offshoot of the Turkish confederacy newly arrived from their homeland in Mongolia under

36 A. D. H. Bivar, “The History of Eastern Iran,” in Ehsan Yarshater (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), vol. 111, pp. 209–12.

37 A. H. Dani, B. A. Litvinsky, and M. H. Zamir Safi, “The Kushano-Sasanian Kingdom,” in Litvinsky et al. (eds.), *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia* (Paris: UNESCO, 1996), vol. 111, pp. 103–18.

38 B. I. Marshak and N. N. Negmatov, “Sogdiana,” in Litvinsky et al. (eds.), *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia*, vol. 111, pp. 234–35.

the leadership of their Khan Sinjibu or Silzaboulos between 558 and 561 CE.³⁹ The Hephthalite kingdom was evenly divided along the Oxos: the lands to the north went to the Turks, those to the south belonged to the Sasanians, although small Hephthalite principalities remained in the regions of Kabul, Herat, and elsewhere in Afghanistan. The last in the line of Hephthalite rulers appears in Arabic writings as the Tarkhan Nizak dynasty, the most famous of whom led the forces that opposed the Arab invasions of c. 650–710 CE. The dynasty, however, survived for several more decades until the middle of the century.⁴⁰ This period of new waves of nomads entering Baktريا on their way southward to Iran and India is marked by the decline of large urban areas, most notably in terms of population and political significance. Cities no longer served as the seats of central authority that presided over large regions; for now this function fell to villages and large estates.⁴¹

While Baktريا experienced the political and social upheavals wrought by incessant nomadic migrations and the increasingly diminished power of Sasanian Iran, to the north the mercantile city-states of Sogdiana flourished from the seventh to the eleventh century CE. Buddhism in Sogdiana had all but disappeared by c. 600 CE and for a time was replaced by a profusion of indigenous cults, Nestorian Christianity, Manichaeism, and a local strain of Zoroastrianism, until they too vanished due to an energized Islam that had fused with Persian culture. The city-states of Bukhara and Samarkand became the leading centers of a trade with China that was founded not on the essentials of everyday life but on life's luxuries – rare and expensive textiles such as silk, pearls, jade, horses, exotic animals and birds, plants, even musicians and dancers, as well as gems, spices, ivory, and the always precious metals of gold and silver. To the west on the river delta of the Amudaria along the southern coast of the Aral Sea, Khwarizm (Chorasnia) had long been the beneficiary of trade with eastern Europe via the Caspian Sea and the Volga River. It remains questionable whether Khwarizm formed part of the Kushan empire and to what degree if any the country formed part of the Sasanian kingdom. Near the beginning of the fourth century, the indigenous Afrighid dynasty seized the Khwarizm throne, perhaps becoming a Hephthalite dependency in the sixth and seventh centuries CE, while in 711–712 CE Qutaiba bin Muslim took advantage of the civil

39 B. A. Litvinsky, "The Hephthalite Empire," in Litvinsky et al. (eds.), *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia*, vol. 111, pp. 138–44.

40 Étienne de la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders: A History* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

41 Litvinsky, "The Hephthalite Empire," pp. 144–62; Dani and Litvinsky, "The Kushano-Sasanian Kingdom," pp. 169–72.

war that had arisen in the country and conquered it, by which time Khwarizm had become an Islamic state.⁴²

Baktria under Arab rule to c. the ninth century CE

The death of Muhammad (c. 570–632 CE) was followed by the rule of the four caliphs who were charged with the secular and spiritual power of the growing nascent Islamic state. During this period much of the Middle East was subdued by the Muslim armies. In 651 CE the last Sasanian king was killed at Merv (formerly, Margiana), which became their base in the region, as it had been for the Sasanians before them. The conquerors colonized the oasis with Arab settlers in 671, thereby transforming Merv and Khorasan into a bastion of Islamic civilization.⁴³

From here the Arabs launched further campaigns, including the conquests of Baktria by 652 CE and by 715 CE Transoxiana, or as it was now called, Mawara'n-nahr – “the land beyond the river,” Amudaria. The assassination of the Muslim army commander Qutayba bin Muslim ushered in a period of internal strife and political weakness that ensued for the next three decades. Tensions finally climaxed in 751 CE at the Battle of Talas (modern Dzhambul) between the army of the Chinese Tang dynasty and that of the Arab Abbasid dynasty as to which civilization, Chinese or Muslim, would determine the fate of Central Asia.⁴⁴ Although the battle itself was fought to a standoff, the Chinese retreated, leaving the region under Muslim rule and with it all of the benefits of belonging to the Islamic world. It was conflicts such as these mixed with episodes of religious zealotry that so annihilated the pre-Islamic culture of the region that by the tenth and eleventh centuries almost nothing survived.

Politically, the Abbasid Caliphate (750–1517 CE), just as others before it in Central Asia, would devolve into numerous provincial dominions ruled by a

42 Xinru Liu, “A Silk Road Legacy: The Spread of Buddhism and Islam,” *Journal of World History* 22 (2011): 55–81.

43 B. A. Litvinsky and M. I. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya, “Religions and Religious Movements – II,” in Litvinsky et al. (eds.), *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia*, vol. 111, p. 424; and B. A. Litvinsky, A. H. Jalilov, and A. I. Kolesnikov, “The Arab Conquest,” in Litvinsky et al. (eds.), *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia*, vol. 111, p. 456.

44 W. Barthold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion*, ed. C. E. Bosworth (London: Lowe and Brydone, 1968), pp. 194–96; Zhang Guang-da, “The City-States of the Tarim Basin,” in Litvinsky et al. (eds.), *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia*, vol. 111, p. 291; and Mu Shun-ying and Wang Yao, “The Western Regions (Hsi-yü) under the T'ang Empire and the kingdom of Tibet,” in Litvinsky et al. (eds.), *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia*, vol. 111, pp. 349–50 and 357.

host of different pretenders, including former Abbasid governors, indigenous dynasties, and clans from myriad tribal families fresh off the steppe. Not until the tenth century was the Samanid dynasty (819–1004 CE), so named after its Persian ancestor Saman-khudat from Balkh, able to establish a strong centralized government based on the Abbasid model at Bukhara that promoted peace and prosperity throughout the region and rivaled only Baghdad in the pursuit of cultural and intellectual achievements.⁴⁵ Bukhara became one of the world's leading cities, situated as it was along the Silk Roads and serving as an important center of trade and commerce, culture, religion, and learning. Not since the days of the Kushans had there been a government strong enough to curtail civil strife, while at the same time keeping the wealth it collected within the region itself rather than allowing it to be carted away to adorn far-off lands.⁴⁶

Conclusion

As a matter of geographical happenstance, Baktria has always stood at the crossroads of history. It is the place where civilizations begin and civilizations end, forming as it were one of the important meeting points of the Afro-Eurasian landmass where the peoples of Inner and Central Asia, China, the Indian subcontinent, the Near East, and the Mediterranean world encountered one another, sometimes peacefully and sometimes not. Whether through the trade and commerce brought by the Silk Roads, or as the nexus of cultural and religious exchange or even as the natural entry point through which conquerors and would-be conquerors passed, those who settled in Baktria created a society that by its very nature was trans-civilizational. It was a society that was as much multicultural as the environment it sought to tame. This is at the heart of the dynamic of Baktrian society, for the encounters among disparate peoples enabled an intercultural borrowing to exist that resulted in a rich and varied form of society. The history of Baktria, then, is the history of civilization itself.

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The Mediterranean

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During the last two millennia before the Common Era, new agrarian states and eventually large and complex agrarian empires appeared in the lands bordering the Mediterranean Sea. The name *Mediterranean* is derived from Latin and means “in the middle of the earth,” a reference to the fact either that it is almost entirely surrounded by land or that it was deemed to be at the center of the known world by ancient West Afro-Eurasian societies. The Mediterranean Sea is connected by the Hellespont to the Black Sea in the east and by the Strait of Gibraltar to the Atlantic Ocean in the west. The coastline of the Mediterranean is almost 29,000 miles long, and it is upon this extensive littoral that a range of human communities eventually found themselves incorporated into expansive agrarian states and empires.

Eastern Mediterranean, c. 1800 – c. 800 BCE

The cultural influence of the Assyrians and Egyptians upon smaller groups, particularly the Hebrews, Phoenicians, Minoans, and Mycenaeans, who occupied the coasts and islands of the Eastern Mediterranean, was substantial. The early Hebrews were pastoral nomadic people who spoke a Semitic language and occupied the dry lands between Egypt, the Mediterranean, and Mesopotamia during the second millennium BCE. They created a new form of religious belief, a monotheism centered on the worship of an all-powerful god they called Yahweh. Most of our evidence for Hebrew history comes from a series of books gathered together to form the Hebrew Bible (which Christians later adopted and termed the “Old Testament” to parallel specific Christian writings termed the “New Testament”). Reverence for these written texts became a hallmark of Judaism – the religion of the Hebrews. The Bible relates that some Hebrews migrated to Egypt, but in the fourteenth or thirteenth century BCE their descendants left Egypt under the leadership of a charismatic visionary named Moses and migrated north to Palestine, on the

southeastern shores of the Mediterranean. This group of Hebrews, now known as the Israelites, organized themselves into a loose confederation of a dozen tribes, which evolved politically into a monarchy that prospered under kings such as David (1000–970 BCE) and Solomon (970–930 BCE).

During the reigns of these kings, the Hebrews constructed an elaborate law code based on a series of rules of behavior, the Ten Commandments, which they understood to have been given by Yahweh to Moses while he was leading the Hebrews out of Egypt. These required certain kinds of religious observances and forbade the Hebrews to steal, kill, lie, or commit adultery. The complex system of rules of conduct built on these provides an intriguing glimpse into many aspects of life, including the status and rights of women in this particular Eastern Mediterranean culture during the first millennium BCE. Some Hebrew laws pertaining to the seduction of virgins by men, or the right of men to sell their daughters into slavery, or the fact that divorce was easy for a man to institute but impossible for a woman, suggest harsh societal attitudes toward women. Others, however, seem to provide legal support for women and even imply similar status for both genders. For example, adultery was punishable by death for both men and women. There is no doubt that Hebrew society was patriarchal, with men in charge in public and within the household, but spouses were also expected to support one another. Celibacy was frowned upon – almost all major Jewish thinkers and priests were married – and the bearing of children was in some ways a religious function.

After the reign of Solomon, renewed tribal tensions resulted in the division of the Israelite state into two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. As the Assyrian state expanded into the region, the kingdom of Israel was conquered in 722 BCE, and tens of thousand of Israelites were deported and resettled throughout the Assyrian realm, the beginning of the Jewish Diaspora (Greek for “scattering”). In 586 BCE, the New Babylonian Empire of Nebuchadnezzar conquered the southern state of Judah, and thousands more Hebrews were sent into exile. The region and its scattered people thereafter remained under the hegemony of a series of foreign invaders for the rest of the era, notably Persians, Macedonians, and Romans. Although the Hebrews appear to have played a minor political role in the history of ancient Afro-Eurasia, their influence on religious thinking has been profound.

To the north of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, another Semitic-speaking group migrated out of the deserts of Arabia to the shores of the Mediterranean around 3000 BCE, where they eventually established a series of city-states. Although they referred to themselves as Canaanites, these people are known to world history as the Phoenicians. Like the Hebrews, their

political history is relatively insignificant, but their long-term cultural and commercial importance is anything but. Phoenician cities like Tyre, Sidon, and Beirut flourished because of the Phoenicians' expertise at seagoing trade. Phoenician merchants imported basic food and resources, but became renowned for their high-value export goods, particularly their superbly dyed textiles. The most prized of these were textiles dyed purple and red with the mucus of the murex sea snail; this may have been the origin of the word "Phoenician," which seems to have come from the Greek word for "purple."

For four centuries between about 1200 and 800 BCE, the Phoenicians dominated Mediterranean trade, establishing commercial colonies in numerous locations on the coasts and islands of the middle sea (see Map 12.1). Phoenician fleets, in search of rare and valuable resources like tin and copper (which were used to make bronze), ivory, and precious stones, sailed as far afield as the Atlantic coasts of France, Spain, and Africa, and even the British Isles. In so doing they quickened the pace of commercial activity in the lands centered upon the Mediterranean and facilitated high levels of cultural exchange between the great civilizations and smaller states of the region. Two other aspects of Phoenician history demonstrate the extraordinary impact that even small players can have upon the stage of world history. They adopted a phonetic alphabet most likely invented in the Sinai Peninsula to write their language, which simplified learning to read and write because the number of characters was much smaller than in writing systems in which characters stood for words or ideas. This proved so flexible that it was later adapted by the Greeks, who in turn passed it on to the Romans, until eventually alphabet writing spread throughout much of the world. And one of their commercial colonies, Carthage, located on the North African coast near modern-day Tripoli, went on to become the capital of a major state that eventually challenged the Romans for control of the entire Mediterranean basin.

The Phoenicians also foreshadow a significant historical development that emerged during the chronological period covered by this volume, but that continued to influence historical processes into the modern era, namely the extraordinary dynamism of smaller commercial states. The Phoenicians established a series of purely commercial city-states that were similar in nature to the ancient Greek *poleis*, the great trading cities of the Indian Ocean, and even the Italian city-states of the early modern era. Because they were focused primarily on trade, commercial city-states were much more innovative than were the great tributary empires. They also tended to



Map 12.1 Trade routes of the Phoenicians

engage more actively with trans-regional webs of exchange, because of their own limited internal resources and highly urbanized commercial populations. Eventually, these often geographically tiny states became politically and militarily powerful enough to challenge and sometimes defeat the vast but sluggish tributary empires.

The Minoans and the Mycenaeans,

c. 2700 – c. 1000 BCE

At the same time that the Hebrews were active in Mesopotamia and Egypt and that the Phoenicians were constructing their commercial city-states along the coast of modern-day Lebanon, a complex society emerged on the island of Crete, in the Eastern Mediterranean. Like the Phoenicians, the Minoans (2700–1450 BCE, named after their legendary founder King Minos) were active maritime traders, and because of its central location Crete became a major commercial center in regional trade networks. The Minoans copied Phoenician shipbuilding techniques and designs and sent their fleets all over the Eastern Mediterranean, exchanging Cretan olive oil, wine, and wool for Egyptian grain, Phoenician textiles, and regional manufactured goods. The Minoans used the wealth generated by successful trade (as opposed to imperial expansion) to create a sophisticated society, and their wealth attracted raiders.

Among the raiders were people who came from the mainland of the Greek peninsula where a different type of society had developed. Migrants who spoke an early form of Greek settled across the Balkans and Greece after about 2200 BCE and built farming communities dominated by defensible great stone fortresses. By about 1650 BCE one group of these immigrants had raised palaces and established cities at Thebes, Athens, Mycenae, and elsewhere. These palace-centers ruled by local kings formed a loose hegemony under the authority of the king of Mycenae, and the archaeologists who first discovered traces of this culture called it Mycenaean. The Mycenaeans copied writing and building techniques from the Minoans. The script of the Minoans (known as Linear A) has never been deciphered, but Mycenaean Linear B clay tablets have been deciphered in the thousands, providing invaluable sources for historians about affairs in the region between roughly 1500 and 1100 BCE.

The Minoan and Mycenaean cultures introduced more complex social structures to the islands and coasts of the Mediterranean basin. On Crete, archaeological evidence of Minoan social hierarchy is ambiguous. Legend

speaks of a founding King Minos, and the English archaeologist Arthur Evans called the large structure with hundreds of interconnected rooms that he unearthed at Knossos a palace. Later scholars have questioned whether there was ever a single male king of the Minoans, however, although fresco evidence seems to suggest that certain groups or even individuals might have occupied positions of leadership for specific tasks within society. Minoan society was also long thought to have been relatively peaceful, but new excavations are revealing more and more walls around cities, which has called the peaceful nature of Minoan society into question.

There is less uncertainty about Mycenaean social structures, which were clearly organized into a hierarchical system, with a king on top and a series of clearly defined socio-political groups below. In the Mycenaean city-state of Pylos, for example, the king possessed large estates and may have been seen as semi-divine, appointed individuals to powerful administrative positions, and was also supported by delegates and officials known as the *hequetai* (followers). Below the noble and administrative classes were workers employed in agriculture (work groups at Pylos seem to have consisted of eighteen men and eight boys); textile production (most likely carried out by slave workers attached to the palace); and metal production (Pylos may have employed up to 400 metalsmiths). Trade in textiles, metals, and other goods was a vital component of Mycenaean society, yet in all of the tablets thus far discovered, there is no mention of a merchant class, suggesting that the elites used their monopoly control of this lucrative activity to further strengthen their power and status.

Minoans appear to have worshipped goddesses far more than gods, and women played the lead role as officials at religious ceremonies. The principal deity was a beautiful Mother Goddess, who was usually dressed in luxurious clothing that sometimes included a strapless fitted bodice (the first fitted garment known to history). In the same way that Indus fertility divinities might have been the prototypes for subsequent Hindu goddesses, it is quite possible that the Minoan Mother Goddess was the inspiration for later goddesses of classical Greek religion, including Athena, Demeter, and Aphrodite. Whether the honoring of female divinities translated into more egalitarian gender roles for real people is unclear, but surviving Minoan art, including frescoes and figurines, shows women as well as men leading religious activities, watching entertainment, and engaging in athletic competitions, such as leaping over bulls. Their elaborately patterned dresses and their beautifully curled and arranged long dark hair suggests that the female spectators had the time, resources, and social freedom to follow high fashion.

Mycenaean society appears to have been more patriarchal than Minoan. Although elite women were given the responsibility of tending to the estates while the men were away at war, both upper- and lower-class females are often depicted performing a range of domestic tasks, including laundry, reaping and grinding grain, and bathing and anointing male warriors. War was common, and military values appear to have shaped Mycenaean society. Graves contain spears, javelins, swords, helmets, and the first examples of metal armor known in the world.

Contacts between the Minoans and Mycenaeans were originally peaceful, and Minoan culture and trade goods flooded the Greek mainland. But most scholars think that around 1450 BCE, possibly in the wake of an earthquake that left Crete vulnerable, the Mycenaeans attacked Crete, destroying many towns and occupying Knossos. For about the next fifty years, the Mycenaeans ruled much of the island. The palaces at Knossos and other cities of the Aegean became grander as wealth gained through trade and tribute flowed into the treasuries of various Mycenaean kings. Prosperity, however, did not bring peace, and between 1300 and 1000 BCE various kingdoms in and beyond Greece ravaged one another in a savage series of wars that destroyed both the Minoans and the Mycenaeans.

The fall of the Minoans and Mycenaeans was part of what some scholars see as a general collapse of Bronze Age societies in the Eastern Mediterranean. This collapse appears to have had a number of causes: internal economic and social problems, including perhaps slave revolts; invasions and migrations by outsiders, who destroyed cities and disrupted trade and production; changes in warfare and weaponry, particularly the adoption of iron weapons, which made foot soldiers the most important factor in battles and reduced the power of kings and wealthy nobles fighting from chariots; and natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and droughts, which reduced the amount of food and contributed to famine. The new cultures that emerged in the region were fundamentally different from their predecessors because of these events.

In Greece, these factors ushered in a period of poverty and disruption that historians have traditionally called the “Dark Age” of Greece (c. 1100–800 BCE). Cities were destroyed, population declined, villages were abandoned, and trade decreased. Pottery became simpler, and jewelry and other grave goods became less ornate. Even writing, which was not widespread in any case, was a casualty of the chaos. In this era, Greek-speaking peoples dispersed beyond mainland Greece, arriving at a time when traditional states and empires had collapsed. By the conclusion of the Dark Age, the Greeks

had spread their culture throughout the Aegean basin, and like many other cultures around the Mediterranean and Southwest Asia, they had adopted iron.

Classical Greece, c. 800 – c. 350 BCE

The Mycenaean practice of building strongly fortified citadels at the heart of their agrarian societies influenced their regional successors, and as political order returned to the Eastern Mediterranean after centuries of unrest, new fortified settlements were constructed that evolved into fully fledged city-states. By 800 BCE, the *polis* (city-state) had become the heart of an emergent Greek culture in which commercial activity and political structures revived. The *poleis* became thriving urban centers administered by a range of different types of government, including monarchy, aristocracy, and oligarchy. Many also came under the control of ambitious individuals who came to power by using their wealth or by negotiating to win a political following that toppled the existing legal government; the Greeks called them “tyrants,” but they were not always oppressive rulers, and they sometimes used their power to benefit average citizens. The Greeks never constructed a unified state but rather coexisted in a series of small, competing states that were as often at war with each other as they were with external states like the Persians. Ultimately this disunity resulted in the virtual self-destruction of Greek culture in a bitterly contested civil war.

Many different *poleis* developed in Greece, but Sparta, situated in a fertile region of southern Greece called the Peloponnesus, became the leading military power. To expand their *polis*, the Spartans conquered Messenia in the southwestern Peloponnesus and turned the Messenians into *Helots*, unfree residents forced to work state lands. The Helots soon rose in a revolt that took the Spartans thirty years to crush. The continuous threat of further revolts by the enslaved Helots (who outnumbered the Spartans by ten to one) led Sparta to devote most of its energy to training an elite military force that facilitated not only the continuing enslavement of the Helots but also Spartan domination of much of the Peloponnesus.

Even family life was sacrificed to the *polis*. After long, hard military training that began at age seven, citizens became lifelong soldiers, the best in Greece. In battle Spartans were supposed to stand and die rather than retreat. Because men often did not see their wives or other women for long periods, not only in times of war but also in peace, their most meaningful relations were same-sex ones. The Spartan military leaders may have viewed

such relationships as militarily advantageous because they believed that men would fight even more fiercely for lovers and comrades. An anecdote frequently repeated about one Spartan mother sums up Spartan military values. As her son was setting off to battle, the mother handed him his shield and advised him to come back either victorious, carrying the shield, or dead and being carried on it. Spartan men were expected to train vigorously, do with little, and like it, qualities reflected even today in the word *spartan*. Spartans expected women in citizen families to be good wives and strict mothers of future soldiers. With men in military service much of their lives, women in citizen families ran the estates and owned land in their own right, and they were not physically restricted or secluded. Many Greeks admired the powerful, disciplined Spartan military machine, but others, particularly the Athenians, saw Sparta as an uncivilized totalitarian state.

Athens was located to the north of Sparta, on the fertile plains of Attica, which gave it access to both farmland and the sea through the nearby port of Piraeus. Athens also had access to some of the richest silver mines in the world. As Athens prospered through agriculture and maritime trade, the major beneficiaries seemed to have been the noble landowning class that controlled government and discouraged agricultural and commercial innovation. Small farmers and landless peasants were often reduced to the status of debt slaves, while commoners within the city resented aristocratic privilege. A series of leaders tried to mediate the increasingly tense relationship between social groups, including Solon, who in 594 BCE passed a series of reforms to try to appease all groups. Eventually debt slavery was canceled, and more and more commoners gained a voice in government. By the early fifth century BCE, all male citizens over the age of 18 could vote in the citizens' assembly, the most democratic form of government thus far seen in world history, although citizen women, slaves, and resident aliens had no vote. Under the leadership of the elected general Pericles (461–429 BCE), Athens became one of the most vibrant commercial and cultural centers in western Afro-Eurasia. (For a detailed discussion of Athens in the fifth century BCE, see Chapter 13 by William Morison in this volume.)

All the Greek poleis experienced rapid population growth between the eighth and fifth centuries (see Map 12.2). In hopes of reducing potential political unrest (and because the Greek peninsula is rugged, with limited agricultural land), many of them settled excess populations by founding colonies along the Mediterranean and Black Sea coasts, beginning in about 750 BCE and continuing for the next 250 years. These colonies built upon the trade networks established by the Phoenicians and Minoans and further



Map 12.2 Classical Greece

unified the entire region. Transplanted Greek colonists also enhanced cultural and intellectual life, and Greek scholars in the Ionian colonies in particular (along the Aegean coast of modern-day Turkey) began systematically to investigate both the natural and the metaphysical world.

These same Ionian colonies brought the Greeks into direct conflict with the rising power of western Eurasia, the Achaemenid Persians, who had created a large empire that was expanding westward. The sophisticated Greek colonies along the Ionian coast resented Persian hegemony, and in 500 BCE they rebelled. The Persians responded by crushing the rebellion, then launching an attack on the Greek peninsula. Despite having vastly superior forces, a Persian army sent by Darius in 490 BCE was defeated on the plains of Marathon. Ten years later, Darius' successor Xerxes invaded Greece with probably the largest military force ever assembled to this point in world history, but the Spartans famously forestalled the Persians at Thermopylae,

and the Athenians destroyed the Persian fleet at Salamis. The Athenians grew so powerful and aggressive that they alarmed Sparta, however. This led to the outbreak of the bitterly divisive Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE) between Athens and her allies, and Sparta and her allies, which brought in its wake disease, widespread civil wars, destruction, famine, and huge loss of life. Following nearly three decades of conflict, intrigue, and plague, the Spartans emerged as nominal “winners,” but conflicts among the city-states of Greece continued.

The Hellenistic era, 350–30 BCE

The Greek city-states wore themselves out fighting one another, and Philip II, the ruler of Macedonia, a kingdom to the north of Greece, gradually conquered one after another and took over their lands. He then turned against the Persian Empire but was killed by an assassin. His son Alexander continued the fight. A brilliant military leader, Alexander conquered the entire Persian Empire from Libya in the west to Bactria in the east. He also founded new cities in which Greek and local populations mixed, although he died while planning his next campaign. Alexander left behind an empire that quickly broke into smaller kingdoms, but more importantly, his death ushered in an era, the Hellenistic, in which Greek culture, the Greek language, and Greek thought spread as far as India, blending with local traditions. The end of the Hellenistic period is generally set at 30 BCE, the Roman conquest of the Hellenistic kingdom of Egypt, but many aspects of Hellenistic culture continued to flourish under Roman governance.

Alexander’s most important legacy was the spread of Greek ideas and traditions across a wide area, a process scholars later called Hellenization. To maintain contact with the Greek world as he moved farther eastward, he founded new cities and military colonies and settled Greek and Macedonian troops and veterans in them. This practice continued after his death, with more than 250 new cities founded in North Africa, West and Central Asia, and southeastern Europe. These cities and colonies became powerful instruments in the spread of Hellenism and in the blending of Greek and other cultures. Wherever it was established, the Hellenistic city resembled a modern city. It was a cultural center with theaters, temples, and libraries – a seat of learning and a place for amusement. The Hellenistic city was also an economic center – a marketplace and a scene of trade and manufacturing.

The ruling dynasties of the Hellenistic world were Macedonian in origin, and Greeks and Macedonians initially filled all-important political, military,

and diplomatic positions. The prevailing institutions and laws were Greek, and Greek became the common spoken language of the entire Eastern Mediterranean. Instead of the different dialects spoken in Greece itself, a new Greek dialect called the *koiné*, which means common, became the spoken language of traders, the royal court, the bureaucracy, and the army across the Hellenistic world. Everyone, Greek or easterner, who wanted to find an official position or compete in business had to learn it. Those who did gained an avenue of social mobility, and as early as the third century BCE local people in some Greek cities began to rise in power and prominence. Cities granted citizenship to Hellenized natives, although there were fewer political benefits of citizenship than there had been in the classical period because real power was held by monarchs, not citizens. Cultural influences in the other direction occurred less frequently because they brought fewer advantages. Few Greeks learned a non-Greek language unless they were required to because of their official position. Greeks did begin to worship local deities, but often these were somewhat Hellenized and their qualities blended with those of an existing Greek god or goddess.

In the booming city of Alexandria, the Macedonian rulers known as the Ptolemies generally promoted Greek culture over that of the local Egyptians. This favoritism eventually led to civil unrest, but it also led the Ptolemies to support anything that enhanced Greek learning or traditions. Ptolemaic kings established what became the largest library in the ancient world, where scholars copied works loaned from many places onto papyrus scrolls, translating them into Greek if they were in other languages. They also studied the newest discoveries in science and mathematics. Alexandria was home to the largest Jewish community in the ancient world, and here Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek for the first time. The kings of Bactria and Parthia spread Greek culture far to the east, and their kingdoms became outposts of Hellenism, from which the rulers of China and India learned of sophisticated societies other than their own. (For a detailed discussion of Bactria, see Chapter 11 by Jeffrey Lerner in this volume.)

When Alexander conquered the Persian Empire, he found the royal treasury filled with vast sums of gold, silver, and other treasure. The victors used this wealth to finance the building of roads, the development of harbors, and especially, as noted earlier, the founding of new cities. These cities opened whole new markets to merchants who eagerly took advantage of the unforeseen opportunities. Whenever possible, merchants sent their goods by water, but overland trade also became more prominent in the Hellenistic era. Trade networks extended into China, from which the most

prominent good was silk, which later gave the major east–west network its name: the Great Silk Roads. (For a detailed discussion of Silk Roads commerce, see Chapter 17 by Xinru Liu in this volume.) This period also saw the development of standardized business customs, so that merchants of different nationalities, aided especially by the *koine*, communicated in a way understandable to them all. Trade was further facilitated by the coining of money, which provided merchants with a standard way to value goods as well as a convenient method of payment.

Slaves were a staple of Hellenistic trade, traveling in all directions on both land and sea routes. Ancient authors cautioned against having too many slaves from one area together, as this might encourage them to revolt. War provided prisoners for the slave market; to a lesser extent, so did kidnapping and capture by pirates, although the origins of most slaves is unknown. Both old Greek states and new Hellenistic kingdoms were ready slave markets, and throughout the Mediterranean world slaves were almost always in demand, working in the shops, fields, farms, and mines, and in the homes of wealthier people.

Despite the increase in trade, the Hellenistic period did not see widespread improvements in the way most people lived and worked. Cities flourished, but many people who lived in rural areas were actually worse off than they had been before, because of higher levels of rents and taxes. Technology was applied to military needs, but not to the production of food or other goods. Manual labor, not machinery, continued to turn out the agricultural produce, raw materials, and manufactured goods the Hellenistic world used.

The mixing of peoples in the Hellenistic era influenced religion, philosophy, and science. The Hellenistic kings built temples to the old Olympian gods and promoted rituals and ceremonies like those in earlier Greek cities, but new deities also gained prominence. More people turned to mystery religions that blended Greek and non-Greek elements, and taught that by the rites of initiation, in which the secrets of the religion were shared, devotees became united with a deity who had also died and risen from the dead. Others turned to practical philosophies that provided advice on how to live a good life.

The Roman Republic and Empire

c. 600 BCE – c. 600 CE

While the Greeks were establishing poleis and setting up colonies in the Aegean, a group of aristocrats in Rome, then a small city in central Italy,

revolted against their king and established a republic ruled by an aristocratic assembly, the Senate. At that moment, late in the sixth century BCE, Rome was no more distinguished than a score of other cities scattered about the Italian peninsula. The ancestors of the Romans had established their villages around a group of seven hills above the plains of Latium, on the banks of the Tiber River. The residents farmed and traded; they were using bronze tools by 1800 BCE and iron by 900 BCE. To the south of Rome, Greek colonies flourished along the coast of the mainland and the island of Sicily. To the north of Rome were the Etruscans (eighth–fifth centuries BCE), who controlled much of northern and central Italy from their fortified cities in Tuscany. In stories told later about the founding of Rome, Etruscan kings came to rule the city, but they were overthrown in a series of events that involved female virtue and male honor. In this founding myth, of which there are several versions, the son of King Tarquin, the Etruscan king who ruled Rome, raped Lucretia, a virtuous Roman wife, in her own home. She demanded that her husband and father seek vengeance, and then committed suicide in front of them. Her father and husband and the other Roman nobles swore on the bloody knife to avenge Lucretia's death by throwing out the Etruscan kings, and they did. Whether any of this story was true can never be known, but Romans generally accepted it as history, and dated the expulsion of the Etruscan kings to 509 BCE. They thus saw this year as marking the end of the monarchical period and the dawn of the republic, which had come about because of a wronged woman and her demands.

Most historians today view the idea that Etruscan kings ruled the city of Rome as legendary, but they stress the influence of the Etruscans on Rome. The Etruscans transformed Rome into a real city with walls, temples, paved roads, a drainage system, and other urban structures. The Romans adopted the Etruscan alphabet, which the Etruscans themselves had adopted from the Greeks.

Though it may not have happened precisely in 509 or thrown out foreign rulers, the revolt by aristocrats was an actual event, and a new form of government was established. Executive power was in the hands of two officials, known as consuls, whose decisions were ratified by the Senate, the real source of power in Rome. Senators and consuls were members of the aristocratic patrician class, whose privileged legal status was determined by their birth as members of certain families. Patrician men dominated the affairs of state, provided military leadership in time of war, and monopolized knowledge of law and legal procedure. The common people of Rome, the plebeians, were free citizens with a voice in politics, but they had few of the

patricians' political and social advantages. While some plebeian merchants rivaled the patricians in wealth, most plebeians were poor artisans, small farmers, and landless urban dwellers.

Inequality between plebeians and patricians led to a long social conflict, in which the plebeians sought to increase their power by taking advantage of the fact that Rome's survival depended on its army, which needed plebeians to fill the ranks of the infantry. According to tradition, in 494 BCE the plebeians literally walked out of Rome and refused to serve in the army. Their general strike worked, and the patricians made important concessions. The plebeians gained the right to elect their own officials (tribunes) who were able to *veto* ("I forbid") unfair consul decisions. Eventually the plebeian assembly (the *Concillium Plebis*) was granted the right to pass laws binding on all Romans. By these various political compromises, the power base was expanded. The patrician elites still managed to maintain their privileged position in society through their ownership of agricultural land, continuous self-enrichment through corrupt practices in the provinces, and their ability to "buy" the votes of plebeian elected officials.

In its foreign affairs, the Roman Republic responded to a series of external threats in a hard-nosed and practical manner that led, rapidly and perhaps unexpectedly, to Roman domination of the entire Italian peninsula. Historians are divided on the question of whether Rome ever intended, at least in its early history, to create a large tributary empire, or whether expansion was rather a result of sensible responses to security threats. Rome was humiliated in 309 BCE by a party of marauding Gauls, who occupied the city and were persuaded to leave only when they were paid a substantial ransom. Thereafter Rome rebuilt its military into a formidable, professional force, and as Etruscan power waned in the north, the Romans fought successful defensive wars against other Latin states and Greek colonies. The Romans did not impose harsh sanctions on defeated peoples, however, allowing conquered states to retain the right of self-government so long as they provided levies of troops and supported Roman foreign policy. This enlightened form of hegemony paid enormous dividends when the Republic faced its sternest challenge in a major struggle with Carthage.

By the year 270 BCE, Rome's one remaining rival in the Central Mediterranean was the Phoenician colony of Carthage, which was probably wealthier than the Republic at that stage and certainly possessed a superior navy. The Mediterranean was simply too small to accommodate two expansive powers, each of which sought increased resources through tribute and booty. In a series of three Punic Wars (264–146 BCE), the Romans eventually

crushed the Carthaginians, although it was a hard-won victory. The Romans next turned east, defeating the Hellenistic kingdoms or turning them into client states. Declaring the Mediterranean *mare nostrum*, “our sea,” the Romans began to create a political and administrative machinery to hold the Mediterranean together under a mutually shared cultural and political system of provinces ruled by governors sent from Rome. Following a subsequent series of smaller campaigns, by 133 BCE Rome was supreme in the Mediterranean. Roman language, law, and culture, fertilized by Greek influences, would in time permeate this entire region.

With the conquest of the Mediterranean world (see Map 12.3), Rome became a great city. The spoils of war went to build theaters, stadia, and other places of amusement, and Romans and Italian townspeople began to spend more of their time in leisure pursuits. This new urban culture reflected Hellenistic influences. Romans developed a liking for Greek literature, and it became common for an educated Roman to speak both Latin and Greek. Furthermore, the Roman conquest of the Hellenistic east resulted in wholesale confiscation of Greek paintings and sculpture to grace Roman temples, public buildings, and private homes.

New customs did not change the core Roman social structures. The male head of the household was called the *paterfamilias*, who had great power over his children. Initially, this seems to have included power over life and death, but by the second century BCE that had been limited by law and custom. Fathers continued to have the power to decide how family resources should be spent, however, and sons did not inherit until after their fathers had died. Most citizens did marry, with patrician women marrying in their mid-teens and non-elite women in their late teens. Grooms were generally somewhat older than their brides. Marital agreements, especially among the well-to-do, were stipulated with contracts between the families involved. If their owner allowed it, slaves could enter a marriage-like relationship called *contubernium*, which benefited their owner, as any children produced from it would be his. Women could inherit and own property, though they generally received a smaller portion of any family inheritance than their brothers. The Romans praised women, like Lucretia of old, who were virtuous and loyal to their husbands and devoted to their children. The wife often supervised domestic arrangements, while her husband conducted his business and political affairs in public. The primary interest of elite Roman males was not in their families but in the affairs of state, and this occupied much of their time. The first-century CE Greek historian Plutarch captured this idealized attitude of the Roman patrician male when he wrote, “it is a noble thing and the mark of an



Map 12.3 Roman Republic

exalted (Roman man's) spirit to exclaim, 'I love my children, but I love my country more.'"

To administer their new expansive, post-Punic Wars state, the Romans adopted a provincial system, with a governor selected from the senatorial class installed in each province. Many governors, however, as representatives of a class deeply imbued with the philosophy of growth through tribute taking, took this as an opportunity for personal profit, and corruption became widespread. When soldiers returned home from war, they found their farms practically in ruins. Many were forced to sell their land to ready buyers who had grown rich from the wars. These wealthy men created huge estates called *latifundia*, where they grew profitable crops like olive oil and wine, rather than necessary staples like grain. Now landless, veterans moved to the cities, especially Rome, but could not find work. These developments not only created unrest in the city but also threatened Rome's army by reducing its ranks. The Romans had always believed that only landowners should serve in the army, for only they had something to fight for. Landless men, even if they were Romans and lived in Rome, were forbidden to serve. The landless veterans were willing to follow any leader who promised help. The leaders who first answered their call were the Gracchi brothers, who proposed dividing public land among the poor and distributing grain cheaply. They were murdered by wealthy senators, launching a long era of political violence that would ultimately destroy the republic.

In this atmosphere of seething discontent, a series of powerful men began to compete for the loyalty of the military and for control of the state. Throughout the first century BCE, Rome was preoccupied by a series of civil wars between the personal armies of men like Marius, Sulla, Pompey, and Julius Caesar, all of whom also engaged in military campaigns further expanding Roman territory. Julius Caesar, an able general, brilliant politician with unbridled ambition, and superb orator, emerged victorious. The Senate began appointing Caesar to various offices, and he was wildly popular with most people in Rome, but some senators opposed his rise to what was becoming absolute power. In 44 BCE a group of conspirators assassinated him and set off another round of civil wars, which were won by Caesar's grandnephew and adopted son Octavian. For his success, in 27 BCE the Senate gave Octavian the name Augustus, meaning "revered one." Although the Senate did not mean this to be a decisive break, that date is generally used to mark the end of the Roman Republic and the start of the Roman Empire.

Augustus claimed that he was restoring the republic, and he never took the title of emperor, preferring instead to be known as *Princeps*, or first man. He

was actually transforming the government into one in which all power was held by a single ruler, however. Augustus fit his own position into the republican constitution not by creating a new office for himself but by gradually taking over many of the offices that traditionally had been held by separate people. His successors needed no such subtlety, and by the end of the fourth century CE, some 140 different men, ranging from the psychotically insane (such as most of Augustus' Julio-Claudian successors, 14–68 CE) to the extremely competent (such as the Antonine emperors, 96–180 CE), had claimed the title Emperor of Rome. Roman expansion, driven by the need to grow through the violent acquisition of external resources, continued throughout the Mediterranean, Saharan Africa, West Asia, and Europe during the first two centuries of the empire. It has been estimated that when the Roman state attained its maximum extent during the second century, its government was administering the affairs of perhaps 130 million people. The city of Rome, home to 1 million people, provided an extraordinary contrast of opulence and poverty.

During this period of evolution from republic to empire, some aspects of Roman society also changed, although the gulf between top and bottom remained very wide indeed. The middle class (known as the *equestrian* class), which now often included freed slaves who had managed to make a fortune in business, increasingly bought their way into positions of power and status. What the wealthy of both the patrician and the equestrian classes learned to do very well for the duration of the empire was to control the plebeians and guard against rebellion by ensuring that there was always enough food for them to eat, and entertainment to divert them from political or egalitarian aspirations. The first-century CE satirist Juvenal expressed this beautifully with the phrase *panem et circenses* (bread and circuses). By ensuring there was always sufficient grain for the dole, by decreeing one hundred public holidays a year, and by providing free and spectacular entertainment on most of these days, the rich and powerful in Roman society provided a mechanism that allowed them to retain their position and divert pent-up resentment among the poor. Many residents of the city of Rome were slaves, who ranged from highly educated household tutors or government officials and widely sought sculptors to workers who engaged in hard physical tasks.

Augustus made a series of political and social reforms that stabilized Roman administration and allowed it to function fairly well even when the emperor was weak. He professionalized the army and awarded grants of land in the frontier provinces to veterans who had finished their twenty-year service. He encouraged local self-government and the development of cities.

As a spiritual bond between the provinces and Rome, Augustus encouraged the cult of *Roma et Augustus* (Rome and Augustus) as the guardian of the state. The cult spread rapidly and became a symbol of Roman unity. In the social realm, Augustus promoted marriage and childbearing through legal changes that released free women and freedwomen (female slaves who had been freed) from male guardianship if they had given birth to a certain number of children. Men and women who were unmarried or had no children were restricted in the inheritance of property. Augustus argued that population increase in the Roman Empire had made it necessary for the state to now regulate matters that were, in the less populous past, affairs that could be handled within the privacy of the family. Moralists denounced any sexual relationship in which men squandered money or became subservient to those of lower social status, although no laws banned prostitution or same-sex relationships.

One of the most significant aspects of Augustus' reign was Roman expansion into northern and western Europe. Augustus completed the conquest of Spain and, after hard fighting, made the Rhine River the Roman frontier in Germania (Germany). Meanwhile, generals conquered areas as far as the Danube River, and Roman legions penetrated the areas of modern Austria, southern Bavaria, and western Hungary. The regions of modern Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania also fell. Within this area the legionaries built fortified camps. Roads linked these camps with one another, and settlements grew up around the camps, eventually becoming towns. Traders began to frequent the frontier and to do business with the people who lived there; as a result, for the first time, central and northern Europe came into direct and continuous contact with Mediterranean culture.

In common with all the great agrarian societies, Roman administrators invested considerable resources into transport infrastructure, not so much as an aid to commerce but rather to speed the movement of armies and aid communications. In total, Roman roads may have been more than 50,000 miles in length. By linking all parts of the empire together effectively, by abolishing all internal trade tariffs and tolls, and by establishing common laws, the Romans were able to integrate vast regions of Western Afro-Eurasia into a relatively homogeneous cultural entity. The Romans also encouraged maritime trade, and ships sailed from Egyptian ports to the mouth of the Indus River, where they purchased local merchandise and wares imported by the Parthians. Despite the dangers and discomforts, some hardy mariners pushed down the African coast and into the Indian Ocean, where they traded with equally hardy local sailors. Roman coins have been found in Sri Lanka

and Vietnam, clear evidence of trade connections, although most likely no merchant traveled the entire distance.

Romans did not force their culture on native people in Roman territories. However, just as earlier ambitious people in the Hellenistic world knew that the surest path to political and social advancement lay in embracing Greek culture and learning to speak Greek, those determined to get ahead now learned Latin and adopted aspects of Roman culture. One sphere where this melding of cultures occurred was language. People used Latin for legal and state religious purposes, but gradually Latin blended with the original language of an area and with languages spoken by those who came into the area later. Slowly what would become the Romance languages of Spanish, Italian, French, Portuguese, and Romanian evolved. Religion was another site of cultural exchange and mixture. Romans moving into an area learned about and began to venerate local gods, and local people learned about Roman ones. Gradually hybrid deities and rituals developed, and new religions were created.

The most important of these new religions was Christianity, created by the followers of Jesus of Nazareth (c. 3 BCE – 29 CE), a Jewish man who lived in the Roman province of Judah. At this point, many Jews opposed Roman rule and believed that a final struggle was near that would lead to the coming of a savior, or Messiah, a descendant of King David who would destroy the Roman legions and inaugurate a period of happiness and plenty for Jews. According to Christian scripture, Jesus was born into this climate of Messianic hope to deeply religious Jewish parents. He began preaching and teaching when he was about thirty, telling of a heavenly kingdom of eternal happiness in a life after death and of the importance of devotion to God and love of others. He attracted a following, which worried the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate, who had him arrested and executed by crucifixion. Jesus left no writings, but accounts of his sayings and teachings that had first circulated orally among his followers were written down sometime in the late first century to build a community of faith. These accounts, which were later brought together along with other writings of some of his early followers to form the Christian Bible, are the principal evidence for Jesus' life and ideas. His teachings were based on Hebrew Scripture and reflected a conception of God and morality that came from Jewish tradition, but he asserted that he taught in his own name, not simply in the name of Yahweh. He said that he was the Messiah (the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah* is "Christus," the origin of the English word *Christ*), and a small group of followers agreed. They also held that he had risen from the dead on the

third day after his crucifixion, had ascended into heaven to join God, and would come again, all of which became central elements of faith.

The memory of Jesus and his teachings survived and flourished. Believers in his divinity met in small assemblies or congregations, often in one another's homes, to discuss the meaning of Jesus' message and to celebrate a ritual (later called the Eucharist or Lord's Supper) commemorating his last meal with his disciples before his arrest. Because they expected Jesus to return to the world very soon, his followers initially regarded earthly life and institutions as unimportant. The catalyst in the spread of Jesus' teachings and the formation of the Christian church was Paul of Tarsus, a well-educated Hellenized Jew who was comfortable in both the Roman and the Jewish worlds. Through visiting followers and writing letters, Paul transformed Jesus' ideas into more specific moral teachings and changed Christianity from a Jewish sect into a separate religion that attracted non-Jews as well. Some Roman officials opposed Christian practices and beliefs and persecuted Christians, including torture and execution, but most persecutions were sporadic and local, and the religion spread along the networks of roads and sea-lanes of the Roman Empire.

The earliest Christian converts included men and women from all social classes, reached by missionaries and others who spread the Christian message through family contacts, friendships, and business networks. People were attracted to Christianity for a variety of reasons: it offered its adherents special teachings that would give them immortality; gave them an ideal of striving for a goal; and provided a sense of identity, community, and spiritual kinship. By the second century CE, the belief that Jesus was coming again soon gradually waned, and as the number of converts increased, permanent institutions were established, including buildings for worship and a hierarchy of officials generally modeled on those of the Roman Empire. Bishops, officials with jurisdiction over a certain area, became especially important, just as provincial governors were in the empire. Christianity also began to attract more highly educated individuals who drew on Greek philosophy to develop complex theological interpretations of issues that were not clear in scripture. Bishops and theologians often modified teachings that seemed upsetting to Romans, such as Jesus' harsh words about wealth. By the late third century, most Romans tolerated Christianity, even if they did not practice it.

By the beginning of the third century, the empire faced serious problems. Silk Roads trade was costing Rome several million gold *aurei* each year. At the same time, the local economy was stagnating as Roman agriculture suffered from overproduction (which drove down prices) and a lack of

innovation. As the quality of leadership declined and no solutions were found to these and other problems, Rome endured a half-century of anarchy during the so-called Crisis of the Third Century (235–284 CE). Some twenty to twenty-five emperors ruled during this period, most of them dying a violent death. The capable Diocletian (r. 284–305) temporarily stemmed the crisis through effective government and sheer force of will, but his attempt to divide the empire into two more manageable halves, each ruled by a co-emperor, failed. Constantine (r. 306–337 CE) made the decision to move the capital of the empire to the city of Byzantium (renamed Constantinople), and to rule the entire structure from there. He also supported Christianity financially and politically, expecting in return the support of church officials in maintaining order, and late in his life he was baptized as a Christian. Helped in part by its favored position, Christianity slowly became the leading religion in the empire, and in 380 the emperor Theodosius (r. 379–395 CE) made it the official religion of the empire, laying the foundation for later growth in church power.

Along with internal economic and political problems, the Romans also faced considerable external threats between the third and fifth centuries. The Parthians were formidable foes along the eastern borders of the empire, and their successors the Sasanians actually captured the Roman emperor Valerian in 260 CE. From the early fourth century on, westward migrations by restive Germanic farming tribes placed considerable strain on the northern borders of the empire. With the arrival of the Huns from Central Asia in the mid-fifth century CE, the pressure became so intense that Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Vandals, Franks, and other German tribes poured across the border and resettled throughout much of the western half of the Roman Empire. Many regions of modern Europe reflect these German settlement patterns, including France (Franks), England (Angles), Andalucía (Vandalucia), and Lombardy (Lombards). By 476 CE a German general Odovocar (435–493) was anointed emperor of the western empire; for many classical historians, influenced by the eighteenth-century English historian Edward Gibbon, that date marks the moment that the Roman Empire “fell.”

As the western empire fragmented into a series of fortified estates and competitive regional kingdoms, the eastern half went from strength to strength. Indeed the Byzantine Empire that emerged there lasted for another thousand years and, along with Tang China and the *Dar al-Islam* (Abode of Islam), became one of the economic and cultural pillars of Afro-Eurasia. (For more on Byzantium and the rest of Europe in late antiquity, see Chapter 14 by Charles Pazdernik in this volume.) Because of Byzantine longevity, many historians argue that the Roman state maintained its domination of large

regions of western Afro-Eurasia for around 2,000 years. Cultural, legal, and social forms created in the Roman Empire left an even longer legacy.

Conclusion

The fall of the Western Roman Empire may not have been as momentous as it was once thought to be, but it still shapes the way in which Western history is periodized, as it marks the end of the classical era. That periodization also shapes world history, with China, India, and the Maya also understood to have a classical period. The dates of these are different from those of the classical period in the Mediterranean, but there are striking similarities among all three places: successful large-scale administrative bureaucracies were established, trade flourished, cities grew, roads were built, and new cultural forms developed. In all these places as well, the classical period was followed by an era of less prosperity and more warfare and destruction.

There were also parallels between the Mediterranean and other regions of Eurasia explored elsewhere in this volume, whose history is not necessarily periodized into classical and post-classical. In many places, small regional states expanded and evolved through the implementation of effective political, military, and economic structures, in a process that eventually allowed for relatively small, elite groups to control vast populations. Within both large political structures, such as the Hellenistic and Roman empires, and smaller cultures and states that did not evolve into large-scale empires, such as those of the Hebrews, Phoenicians, Minoans, and Mycenaeans, expansion invariably led to the emergence of more complex social structures, which explicitly situated various groups, including women and slaves, into more sharply delineated hierarchical structures. At the same time, sophisticated scientific and philosophical ideas emerged in many cultures, including those of the Mediterranean region, which went on to have a profound impact on the subsequent history of the world.

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Regional study: Athens in the fifth century BCE

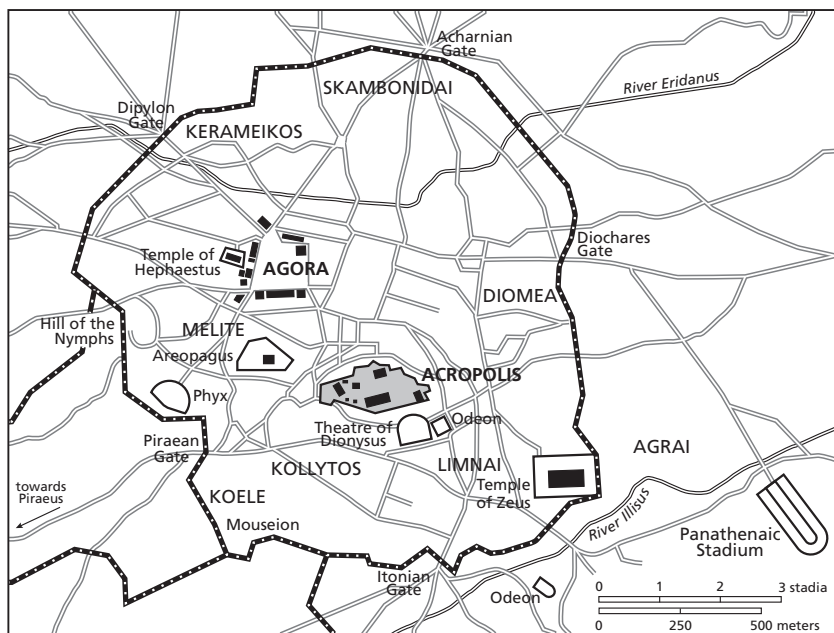
WILLIAM MORISON

Aside from Jerusalem, no city has had a greater impact on world history relative to its size than fifth-century BCE Athens, whose rise from a relatively minor Greek *polis*, or city-state, to a major military and economic power dominating the Eastern Mediterranean was a remarkable achievement. Even more lasting were Athenian advances in drama, philosophy, historical writing, art and architecture, and politics – none of which were invented by Athenians, but all of which blossomed in Athens during the fifth century – that would make a lasting contribution to world culture.

Geography and natural resources

Attica, as the area surrounding the city of Athens is called, comprised an area of about 2,550 km², smaller than many modern US counties, but larger than most of the other Greek *poleis*. Much of this land consisted of a series of low mountains and valleys surrounding the town of Athens, which grew up around a small limestone hill, the Acropolis, in a small plain about 12 km inland from the coast. The arable land of Attica was too sparse to support a significant urban population, and from at least the sixth century BCE forward the Athenian populace relied on imported grain. The terrain did provide some advantages, as tree fruit and olives in particular grew well in the rough Athenian soil. Athenian clay was also highly regarded and provided the necessary resources for one of Athens' most famous products, its pottery. In addition, the nearby mountains provided limestone and fine, high-quality marble without which some of the most iconic buildings of classical Greece would have been impossible (see Map 13.1).

Sitting like a triangle pointing into the Aegean, Athens enjoyed a long coastline in the center of the western Aegean Sea. With excellent adjoining bays at Phaleron and Piraeus, the Athenians enjoyed two of the finest natural



Map 13.1 Athens in the fifth century BCE

harbors in the entire Mediterranean.¹ Indeed, the modern Piraeus is today the busiest passenger port in Europe and one of the busiest container ports anywhere in the world.

The Athenians enjoyed yet another advantage of natural resources: rich silver mines at Laurion in southeastern Attica. While the rest of central and southern Greece was devoid of precious minerals, Laurion provided Athens with a ready supply of coins that few Greek states at the time possessed and helped to make up for the poor quality of Athens' sparse farmland. Indeed, the discovery of a particularly rich vein of silver around 483 BCE would enable Athens to build the largest naval force of any Greek polis of the time.

With these advantages of geography and natural resources, scholars estimate that by 430 BCE approximately half a million people lived in Attica, though only about 12 percent of these enjoyed the benefits of Athenian citizenship and nearly half of the total population were chattel slaves.² As

1 Mogens H. Hansen and Thomas H. Nielsen (eds.), *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis* (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 624–26.

2 Hansen and Nielsen (eds.), *Inventory*, p. 627.

was the case with most other preindustrial societies, most Athenians did not live in the city itself, but in one of the many *demes*, or towns, in the surrounding countryside. For much of the fifth century BCE, this was the case; however, political, military, and economic factors would gradually urbanize the populace.

Historical overview

Athens had not only some advantages in geography and resources but also favorable historical circumstances and remarkable leadership on its side. During the sixth century BCE, Athens had been either embroiled in civil conflict or living under the tyrannical reign first of Peisistratus and then of his son Hippias. While Athenian pottery and olive oil were prized commodities in the Mediterranean world, the city had played no role in the colonizing efforts that had seen Greek communities spread from the Black Sea to the Iberian Peninsula, nor did the city have a large navy or a particularly impressive army. Indeed, Athenians of earlier times had played only a passing role in the great epics of Homer, and other great mythical stories had centered on cities like Thebes and Mycenae. Other than the sage Solon, Athens could boast of no great poets to rival Sappho of Lesbos or philosophers to rank with the Milesian Thales.

This situation began to change in 507 BCE with the establishment of a new, radical political system that would come to be called *demokratia*. This new government would find itself tested when in 490 BCE, at the bay of Marathon in northeast Attica, an outnumbered Athenian force decisively defeated an army sent by the Persian king to punish the city's support of Ionian rebels and to reinstall the aged former tyrant Hippias.³ A decade later, a second and much larger force descended on Greece and sacked Athens in retribution. However, the wise use of Laurion silver to build a fleet of 200 triremes became key in the defeat of a Persian armada near Salamis.⁴ Leadership of the allied Greek resistance to the invasion belonged to the Spartans, but following the defeat of the Persian army at Plataea in 479 BCE and the bad behavior of the Spartan commander, the Athenians took over what came to be called the Delian League. While ostensibly formed to defeat Persia, this League placed Athens at the head of a powerful military machine to which most members

3 Peter Krentz, *The Battle of Marathon* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 64–65.

4 Borimir Jordan, *The Athenian Navy in the Classical Period* (Berkeley: University of California, 1975), pp. 16–20.

contributed money rather than men. As hostilities with Persia wound down in the late 470s and early 460s, some allies such as Naxos and Thasos attempted to leave the league but were compelled by military force to remain members – secession was not an option.

With the move of the league treasury to Athens in 454 BCE, the League transformed into an Athenian Empire (see Map 13.2) that often interfered with the internal affairs of its subject allies and used league funds for the building of some of the most remarkable architectural structures on the Athenian Acropolis.⁵ During this period, expansionist Athens became embroiled in a series of conflicts with members of the Peloponnesian League led by Sparta. The first of the “Peloponnesian Wars” (460–445 BCE) ended with a peace treaty that enshrined Athenian dominance at sea, and a resumption of hostilities fifteen years later continued this asymmetrical conflict between Athenian sea power and Peloponnesian superiority in land battles. The fighting came to an end only with the decisive annihilation of the Athenian navy in 405 BCE and the starvation of the city into submission by Sparta and its allies the following year.⁶

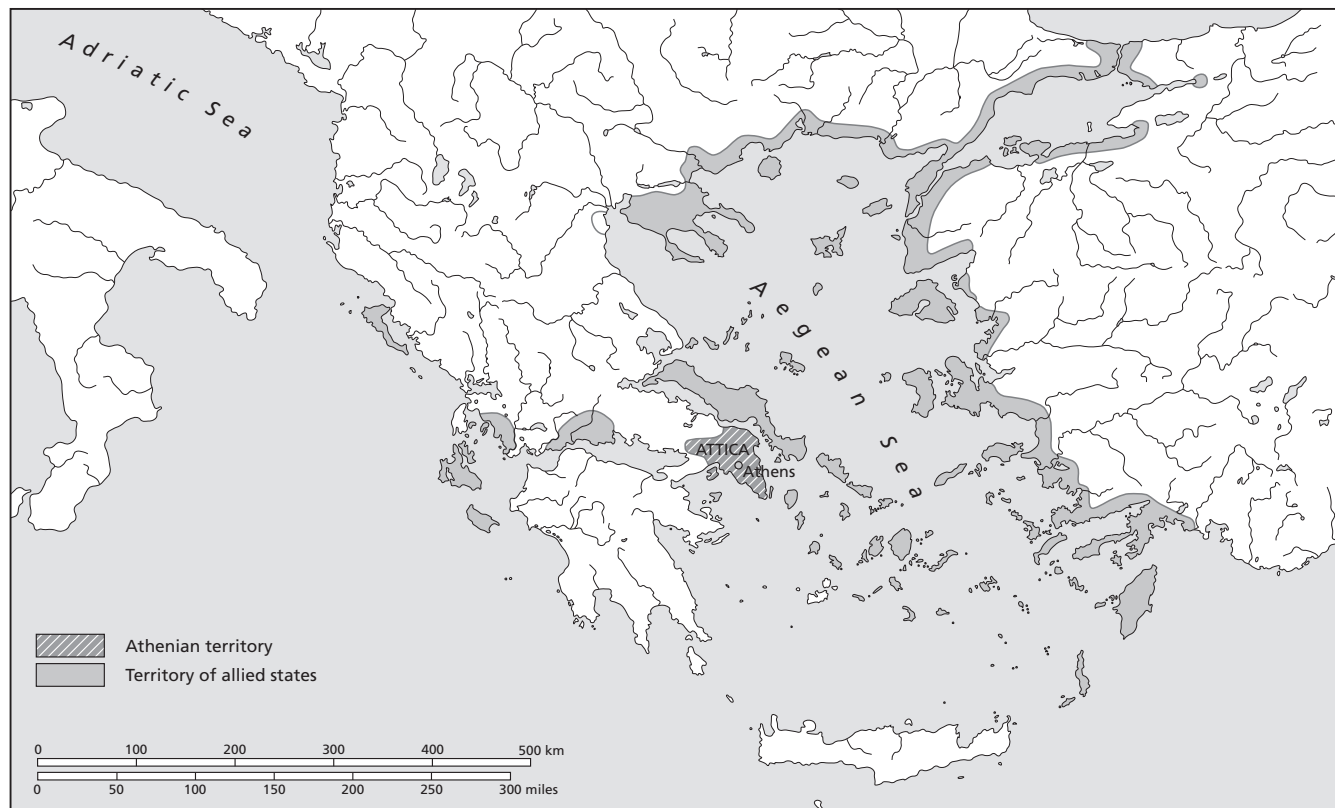
Government

Interrupted by only two brief periods of oligarchic rule during the fifth century BCE, the Athenian government was characterized by a participatory system that had come to be called *demokratia*. Scholars differ over whether this new regime was the creation of the political elite or a movement that arose from the lower classes, but in either case it enfranchised a larger part of the free male population than was the case in any other Mediterranean state. The Athenian Assembly, which met at least ten times per year on the Pnyx Hill and comprised whichever 5,000–6,000 Athenian citizens were present at a given meeting, was the sovereign body of state and was considered equivalent to the *demos*, or people of Athens.⁷ Decisions passed by the Assembly had the immediate force of law and could only be overturned by the Assembly itself. Day-to-day operation of the state was controlled by a Council of 500 chosen by a lottery system for a one-year term and roughly representative of Attica. The Council could pass decrees concerning minor

5 P. J. Rhodes, *A History of the Classical Greek World 478–323 BC* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 31–70.

6 Rhodes, *A History of the Classical Greek World*, pp. 81–154.

7 Mogens H. Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), pp. 125–60.



Map 13.2 The Athenian Empire

matters; it also prepared the Assembly's agenda and oversaw the mass of boards and committees that did much of the state's regular business. In addition, juries of 201 or more citizens – the jury that heard Socrates' famous trial was 501 – were also chosen by lot and heard each of their cases, whether on a small matter or a capital charge, in a single day. It has been estimated that juries met between 175 and 225 days each year, making the Athenians a remarkably litigious society. Private citizens brought all prosecutions, the accused provided his or her own defense, and decisions were determined by a majority of the jury. Although laws concerning a matter would be read, the persuasiveness of one side against another could easily sway a jury.⁸

The widespread use of the lot to empanel magistrates, governmental committees, and juries along with pay for public office saw rising numbers of the poorer classes taking power.⁹ Though popular leaders like Cimon and Pericles often influenced the Assembly's actions, they ultimately owed their positions to the mercurial and sometimes fickle desires of the Athenian citizenry. While certain major offices, such as generalships and management of the water supply, were elective, most were filled by lottery, thus emphasizing the equality of one Athenian with another to a remarkable degree. Pay for service on juries beginning in 462 BCE, a practice that gradually extended to office holding as well, made it possible, and indeed attractive, for poorer Athenian citizens to participate in the running of the state.¹⁰

The rights and obligations of citizenship were limited to males of Athenian descent (after 450 BCE one had to have both an Athenian father and an Athenian mother). Of this minority, Athenians belonged to one of four classes based on property: the *pentekosiomedimnoi* and *hippeis* were the wealthiest, the *zeugitai* mostly middling farmers, and the *thetes* men with little or no property. This system is attributed to the reforms of Solon in the early sixth century and allowed for changes of status, but even at the democracy's most radical stages *thetes* were barred from holding high office. For those with citizen status, however, there was not only remarkable freedom, but also a high level of participation in the operation of the state. All citizens could attend and speak in the Assembly, the sovereign legislative body of the state; all had a right to freedom of speech; all could participate in the juries, boards, and offices that constituted the state (except sometimes the *thetes* and *zeugitai*).¹¹

8 Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy*, pp. 178–203.

9 Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy*, pp. 232–33.

10 Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy*, pp. 188–89.

11 P. J. Rhodes, *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia* (Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 136–49.

Military

A key to understanding the reasons for this remarkable expansion of political enfranchisement lies in the connection between political rights and military service. As was the case in most Greek poleis, full citizenship in early Athens was tied to obligatory military service from the ages of 18 to 60 and to the ownership of land that enabled a citizen-soldier to provide his own armor and weapons to fight as a hoplite (or infantryman). Indeed, in most Greek city-states political rights were restricted to those with land and the ability to provide one's own arms and time while on campaign.¹²

However, the rise of Athenian power after the late 480s BCE was guaranteed more by its navy of 200 to 300 triremes, each of whose 170 oars were manned largely by the poorer *thetes*, rather than by the wealthier classes who made up the hoplite infantry and cavalry. The success of Athenian sea power in defeating Persia and creating an empire of subject allied states led to greater participation in the running of the state by the poorer classes and, by extension, all the citizenry.¹³

Society and economy

The city of Athens was not just a political and military center; it was also the focus of a commercial empire that controlled trade in the Aegean. Goods flowed into and through the city and people traveled from all over the Eastern Mediterranean to do business there. Democracy and empire transformed Athens from a primarily agrarian society into a progressively urbanized regional state with expanding manufacturing and trade that dominated the economy of the Aegean Sea and Eastern Mediterranean. Because much of Attica lacked good soil for growing staple crops like wheat and barley, olive oil was the major agricultural export. To support its relatively large population, grain had to be imported (mainly from ports in the Black Sea in what today is the Crimea). The excellent harbors at Phaleron and Piraeus facilitated trade in silver from Laurion, and tribute from its subject allies made it possible to support a rising standard of living. The commercial center of Athens itself was the Agora (see Fig. 13.1), a large open area north of the Acropolis that functioned as a marketplace but also

12 Victor D. Hanson, *The Western Way of War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 89.

13 John R. Hale, *Lords of the Sea: The Epic Story of the Athenian Navy and the Birth of Democracy* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), pp. 95–99.



Figure 13.1 Reconstruction of the Acropolis in the early fourth century BCE (akg-images / Peter Connolly)

included key parts of government, religious sites, and the state mint. By the fourth century BCE, the trade emanating from these centers had grown into something akin to a modern market economy.¹⁴

¹⁴ Edward E. Cohen, *Athenian Economy and Society: A Banking Perspective* (Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 3–8.

As a result of this growing economy, Athens became increasingly urbanized and cosmopolitan with a small, but significant, number of *metics*, or resident aliens, who paid a special tax to live and work in the city, setting up various businesses. Houses in Athens tended to be small, semi-detached structures with little or no space between them.¹⁵ Other than the Agora and some sacred precincts, there was little open space in the city that was not packed with houses, private businesses, or workshops run by citizens or *metics* that turned out many different types of finished products, such as fine pottery, military equipment, and leather goods. Working in these shops were both free persons and slaves.

The pervasive nature of slavery in Athens is difficult to overstate. Even a modest Athenian farmer may have owned a few slaves, as did state and religious organizations. Indeed, it has been reasonably estimated that nearly half of the total population of Athens were slaves. Slaves were the backbone of the Athenian economy; however, they had no rights under Athenian law and were treated as chattel property to be used and disposed of at the whim of their owners. Slaves might also be leased or sold by their owners to work in the silver mines or as skilled laborers in factories or on building projects. Others might be employed as secretaries and teachers, while most of the prostitutes in the city's many brothels were slaves.¹⁶ Suffice to say, without slave labor, the cradle of western democracy would have collapsed.

Athens also had a landed aristocratic elite, whose members often traced their ancestries back to a legendary Heroic Age and shared in a *paideia*, or culture, of poetry, music, and athletic competition that would have been immediately recognized by other aristocrats across the Greek world. Some nobles, like the philosopher Plato, were famously antagonistic toward the democracy; however, the aristocratic Pericles and Cimon served year after year as elected generals in service to the state and were champions of the democracy. Additionally, the wealthiest in Athens were expected to periodically pay liturgies or special taxes for a public service, such as the cost of fitting out and manning a trireme for a year. Despite having to share political power with their social inferiors and having to pay added taxes, a significant number of aristocrats lived in Athens and actively supported the democracy. Indeed, the wealthy often used their paying of liturgies as a key to their defense should they find themselves the object of a lawsuit or under political attack.¹⁷

15 Peter Connolly, *The Ancient City* (Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 48–55.

16 Edward E. Cohen, *The Athenian Nation* (Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 130–32.

17 John Kenyon Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families 600–300 BC* (Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. xvii–xxxi.

Athenian women, on the other hand, had neither political rights – as was normally the case in the premodern world – nor legal rights and were among the most sequestered in the Greek world. Aside from attendance at religious festivals, free Athenian women of the upper classes would seldom leave their homes and should they do so would be accompanied by a male member of the household. The few instances of educated women that we know of are either among the wealthy elite – and these women inevitably were regarded with suspicion by the ancient sources – or expensive courtesans whose education was intended to make them more engaging to the men who paid for their services. Poorer women, whose families relied on their labor on the farms, selling produce and goods or being wet-nurses, had in many respects greater freedom of movement than their richer counterparts.¹⁸

Education and philosophy

The remarkable explosion of documents inscribed on stone for public view in Athens beginning in the middle of the fifth century BCE attests to a rising number of literate Athenians. Indeed, education was key to power and wealth in a litigious, participatory democracy. Rhetorical training was of particular importance as a means to political power and for protecting one's wealth from predatory prosecutions.

This interest in persuasive speech attracted the best – and most expensive – teachers from all over the Greek world, like the long-lived Gorgias of Leontini (c. 483–375 BCE) whose demonstrations of rhetoric's power to prove even the most absurd ideas had a profound impact on public speakers and on subsequent prose writers. Many of these sophists, as they were known, charged heavy fees and claimed that they could teach their pupils to win any argument.¹⁹ In Plato's dialogue *Protagoras*, set in the house of an Athenian aristocrat whose wealth had grown from leasing slaves to work in the mines, Protagoras of Abdera engages with Athens' own Socrates (479–399 BCE) in a spirited *tête-à-tête* over the sophist's claim to be able to teach excellence in making wise political decisions. The argument ends inconclusively, but more importantly Socrates demonstrates that Protagoras makes claims to knowledge that he does not actually possess.

The son of a stonemason and midwife, Socrates first pursued and then rejected the study of natural philosophy, which had been the chief pursuit of

18 Anton Powell, *Athens and Sparta: Constructing Greek Political and Social History from 478 B.C.* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 348–403.

19 W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge University Press, 1971).

those seeking wisdom down to his day. He equally denounced the relativism and agnosticism of the sophists, preferring to seek ethical and moral principles grounded in knowledge and virtue.²⁰ Socrates' desire to seek knowledge through questioning and reason rather than authority established him as the founder of western ethical and moral philosophy. He wrote nothing himself, and much of what is known of Socrates comes down to us in the dialogues of students, principally Plato (428–348 BCE).

Starting with his teacher's epistemological questions, Plato himself was a profound original thinker and argued for the existence of incorporeal "Forms" that make up reality, with the physical world around us being mere shadows.²¹ Another great product of this intellectual cauldron was Aristotle (384–322 BCE), a *metic* who was Plato's student and arguably the greatest polymath in the western tradition. He broke with his teacher's metaphysical concepts and undertook to systematically understand the physical world. As a result, he is justifiably seen as the founder of disciplines as diverse as biology, political science, and literary criticism, to name just a few.²²

Religion

Despite being a nexus for theological skeptics like the sophists, the lives of most Athenians were circumscribed from birth to death by the worship of many gods. Devotion to the gods not only was practiced on an individual level but also was a profoundly societal phenomenon that played itself out in the large number of festivals and sacrifices put on at public expense. In addition, many of the most famous architectural achievements in Athens were constructed, at least in part, as religious dedications. Modern notions of "the separation of church and state" would have been an utterly alien concept to a fifth-century Athenian.

Religious practice in Athens had a pervasive and public character that followed every citizen from cradle to grave. In the fall of the year following a citizen's birth, a young boy would be registered in a phratry and a lock of his hair dedicated at the altar of Zeus Phratrios – a parallel deity, Athena Phratria, existed for girls – at the Apatouria festival.²³ His phratry membership would become critical proof of citizenship. Poorer Athenian youth normally learned

20 James A. Colaiaco, *Socrates against Athens* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 99–104.

21 G. M. A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), pp. 1–50.

22 Georgios Anagnostopoulos, *A Companion to Aristotle* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 3–15.

23 S. D. Lambert, *The Phratries of Attica* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), pp. 25–57.

a trade or worked in the fields from any early age, but if from a well-off family, a youth would attend a gymnasium for exercise and education, where he would find himself surrounded by altars to various gods such as Eros in the Academy or Apollo in the Lyceum. In the palaestrae, or wrestling schools, he would give sacrifices to other gods, such as Hermes and Heracles.²⁴ As he grew closer to adulthood, a young man might go through rudimentary military training as an ephebe, part of which included an oath not only to protect the borders of Attica but also to know where the city's important shrines were and to be pious.²⁵ A young woman might be chosen to go and perform rites at the temple complex of Artemis Brauronia, where she might dedicate a statue of a small child in the hope of healthy children.²⁶ As a politically active citizen, an Athenian would witness the sacrifice of a pig at the opening of a meeting of the Assembly²⁷ and attend many of the city's religious festivals, the most important of which was the Panathenaea that combined a spectacular torch race, a parade, athletic competitions, and spectacles with worship of the city's patron goddess Athena.²⁸ On a personal level, were an Athenian to make a binding contract, oaths might be taken to Zeus Horkios; his marriage would be overseen by Hera; the hearth in his home revered as sacred to the deity Hestia; and prayers for his children would be made to the goddess Eileithyia.²⁹ At some point in his adult life, he also might be invited to become an initiate in the Mysteries of Demeter at the nearby city of Eleusis.³⁰ In the case of illness, an Athenian or his family would pray or make sacrifices to Asclepius, the god of healing. At his death, a series of rites and the burial of his ashes would be performed to ensure that his soul made its proper journey to the underworld.³¹ If anything, this brief narrative understates the numerous dedications, prayers, and sacrifices that even the most ordinary Athenian would expect to make throughout his or her life.

24 W. S. Morison, "An Honorary Deme Decree and the Administration of a Palaistra in Kephissia," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 131 (2000): 93–98.

25 Robin Osborne and P. J. Rhodes (eds.), *Greek Historical Inscriptions 404–323 BC* (Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 440–45.

26 M. Poulkou, "Arkteia: Überlegungen zu den nackten 'Bärinnen' in Brauron," in *Akten des 10. Österreichischen Archäologentages in Graz* (Vienna: Phoibos, 2006), pp. 155–59.

27 Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy*, p. 142.

28 Alan L. Boegehold, "Group and Single Competitions at the Panathenaea," in Jenifer Neils (ed.), *Worshipping Athena: Panathenaea and Parthenon* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), pp. 95–105.

29 Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 170–71.

30 George E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 237–43.

31 Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 21–37.

Religious festivals also represented one of the rare occasions that freeborn women could be seen in public, and in the case of the festival of the Thesmophoria for Demeter, which was held in the autumn, only married women could attend. Moreover, the service of women as priestesses of some of the key deities of the city represented the only public office that could be held by females in an overwhelmingly male-dominated society. Indeed, the priestess of Athena Polias was considered the most important religious office in the city and was held by a female member of one of Athens' oldest aristocratic families.³²

Lastly, the most impressive buildings in fifth-century Athens were temples, such as the one to Hephaestus that still dominates the hill overlooking the western side of the Agora today. As was the case elsewhere in the Greek world, these buildings were constructed to house cult statues rather than as centers of worship. The most impressive array of such structures was on the Acropolis, which was the religious heart of the city and was covered with temples, altars, treasuries filled with dedications, as well as freestanding sculpture in honor of the gods.

Altars, such as the one to Aphrodite that one would have encountered standing on the road into the Agora from the north, were the centers of worship and sacrifice.³³ There one would find Athenians of every social class making sacrifices or saying prayers in the hopes of gaining the good side (or at least not the enmity) of a god.

Architecture and art

The combination of wealth, religious zeal, aesthetic and technical innovation, and a desire to display the power of Athens led to dramatic achievements in art and architecture during this period, as may be witnessed in mediums such as vase painting, sculpture, and buildings such as the Parthenon and Erechtheum.

From the late seventh century BCE, Athens, along with neighboring Corinth, had been one of the great centers of black figure pottery, which was popular throughout the Greek world and has been found in quantity in sixth-century Etruscan tombs in northern Italy.³⁴ These fineware pots illustrated with motifs from mythology or scenes from daily life were

32 Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, *Athenian Myths and Festivals* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 263–66.

33 John McK. Camp, *The Athenian Agora* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), pp. 56–57.

34 John Boardman, *Athenian Black Figure Vases* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), pp. 9–11.



Figure 13.2 Vase painting showing the downfall of Troy (INTERFOTO / Alamy)

primarily used for symposia (male drinking parties) or for special occasions. Around 530 BCE the Athenians pioneered a new technique of pottery decoration known as red figure that by the early fifth century had replaced the earlier black figure, save for special-purpose vessels such as the amphorae given as prizes in the Panathenaea.³⁵ The new red figure style had the advantage of giving an artist greater possibilities of showing motion and naturalism in his subjects and rapidly became popular throughout the Greek world. The depiction of the terrible sack of Troy by the Kleophrades painter includes the rippling musculature of the warriors, the broken body of young Astyanax, as well as a grieving King Priam, who is being sacrilegiously killed while sitting on the altar of Athena (see Fig. 13.2).³⁶ Only shortly before this work was completed, Athens itself had been sacked and its temples destroyed by the Persian army in 480 BCE.

35 Dyfri Williams, "Refiguring Attic Red-Figure: A Review Article," *Revue Archéologique* 2 (1996): 227–52.

36 John Boardman, "The Kleophrades Painter at Troy," *Antike Kunst* 19 (1976): 3–18.

Thus, the myth's depiction may be taken as a comment on contemporary events.

A similar, but more direct, mixing of mythical and contemporary subjects was displayed in the great panel paintings that were on display in the Stoa Poikile or Painted Stoa at the north end of the Agora from about the 460s B.C.E. These panels, executed by famous artists such as Mikon, Panaenus, and Polygnotus, depicted the mythological sacking of Troy and the defeat of the Amazons by the great hero-king Theseus side by side with great paintings of the Athenian victories at Marathon over Persia and in what was a relatively minor clash at Oenoe over Sparta. Lost to the depredations of a Roman proconsul in the fourth century C.E., we can only imagine the technical skill of these artists.³⁷

In the realm of sculpture we are on firmer ground, though the originals of much of the greatest work of the fifth century are also lost. The great chryselephantine statue of Zeus that was probably over 40 feet high and housed in god's temple at Olympia by Phidias of Athens was ranked by later authorities as one of the famous Seven Wonders of the ancient world. Earlier, Phidias had made his mark as the director of the sculptural program – the most ambitious on any temple in Greek history – for the Parthenon on the Athenian Acropolis. The crowning jewel of this project was also an enormous chryselephantine statue, this time of Athena, now known to us only through later copies and the descriptions of later writers.³⁸ Significant parts, however, of the Parthenon's sculptural decoration have survived and are marked by not only tremendous skill but also innovation. The great sculptures that adorned the east and west pediments celebrated the birth of the goddess and the competition between Poseidon and Athena with a beauty that captures remarkable moments in the life of both the deity and Athens itself. Other sculpted reliefs on the temple's metopes depicted battles between the forces of civilization and barbarism, such as the Lapiths and Centaurs; but the most innovative and striking piece was a frieze depicting the Athenians themselves taking part in the great Panathenaic procession.³⁹ The figures of the horsemen are outstanding examples of the characteristic attention to

37 John McK. Camp, *The Archaeology of Athens* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 67–69 and 231–32.

38 Jeffrey M. Hurwit, "The Parthenon and the Temple of Zeus at Olympia," in Judith M. Barringer and Jeffrey M. Hurwit (eds.), *Periklean Athens and Its Legacy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), pp. 135–45.

39 Jenifer Neils, *The Parthenon Frieze* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 49–60.



Figure 13.3 Cavalcade from the west frieze of the Parthenon, Athens (© Corbis)

detail in depicting animals and riders in a natural, if idealized, form and also in communicating a sense of motion and wonder (see Fig. 13.3).

As a building the Parthenon was a work of stunning genius. Built almost entirely from local marble from nearby Mt. Pentele, the structure contains a number of optical and structural refinements that make it to this day the most imposing building in the city and have helped it survive many earthquakes and human-created catastrophes over its more than 2,500-year history. Paid for mainly with funds from its subject allies, the building served primarily to house the great statue of Athena as well as the treasury for the Delian League (which had moved to Athens some seven years before construction began in 447 BCE).⁴⁰ Thus, the Parthenon demonstrated Athenian power and dominance on a host of levels.

Literature and music

This combination of innovative daring and popular support could also be found in the literary achievements of the great Athenian tragic and comic poets, whose work was performed at state-supported religious festivals. Other areas of poetry and music also developed during this period in

⁴⁰ Jeffrey M. Hurwit, *The Athenian Acropolis* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 50 and 161–69.

Athens, and new literary genres in prose, such as historical writing, blossomed from the mythographic and geographical works of earlier writers like Pherecydes and Hecataeus into the groundbreaking work of the analytical historians Herodotus and Thucydides.

During the last half of the sixth century, Athens had become something of a center for the literary arts under the Peisistratids, who had sponsored the festival of the City Dionysia for the performance of tragedy. While our knowledge about these early performances is limited, they appear to have consisted of a chorus and one actor playing all the roles. Under the democracy, the City Dionysia was put on at public expense in a theater on the south slope of the Acropolis, and the choice of plays to be performed was decided by state officials. Each playwright would be assigned a chorus, the expense of which was covered through a liturgy paid by a wealthy citizen.⁴¹

Many have identified the playwright and Persian War veteran Aeschylus (c. 525–456 BCE) as the father of tragedy because he revolutionized these plays by adding a second actor and making the staging and costuming much more elaborate.⁴² Another of Athens' great innovative tragedians was Sophocles (c. 496–405 BCE), whose professional career spanned over fifty years. Taking the work of Aeschylus a step further, he added a third actor, creating even greater character development and complexity, and he even composed a treatise on the chorus, which unfortunately does not survive.⁴³ Like Aeschylus, whose participation in the Battle of Marathon was celebrated in the Painted Stoa, Sophocles was elected general at least once and in his eighties was also elected to high public office in the aftermath of a disastrous Athenian campaign in Sicily. However, the last of Athens' three great tragic poets, Euripides (480–406 BCE), never held public office and had a more complex relationship with his public. Having grown into adulthood in the heyday of Athenian power and the intellectual world of the sophists, Euripides pushed the boundaries of tragedy by experimenting with the genre in the partly burlesque *Alcestis* and exploring the consequences of war in plays like *The Trojan Women* and female rage in *Medea*.⁴⁴ Unlike his predecessors, Euripides was more popular and influential after his death than he was during his own lifetime.

41 Robin Osborne, "Competitive Festivals and the Polis: A Context for Dramatic Festivals at Athens," in P. J. Rhodes (ed.), *The Athenian Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 213–20.

42 John Herington, *Aeschylus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 1–31.

43 Ruth Scodel, *Sophocles* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), pp. 1–11.

44 Ann N. Michelini, *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p. 94.

The work of dozens of other great Athenian tragedians like Pratinas and Agathon is lost to us, except for quotations in the works of later authors; lost also is the choreography – dance was an important element in choral performance – and the music that accompanied the chorus' singing, even in the handful of plays that we have. However, one Athenian musicologist, named Damon, wrote a treatise not only analyzing particular rhythms and meters but also covering music's effect on morals and, thus, the role of music in education.⁴⁵ While this work is now lost, we can say that music was yet another arena of intellectual debate in which Athenians were at the forefront.

Another literary genre that developed during the fifth century was comedy. Similar to tragedy in its production at public expense for religious festivals, competitions for comic plays were held annually either at the City Dionysia or at the Lenaea, which was held in January for the god Dionysus. Although we know the names of dozens of comic writers like Eupolis and Platon who wrote a great many plays, only eleven plays, by Aristophanes (c. 445–380 BCE), survive to give us a taste of their often biting and obscene political and social commentary. Unlike the relatively tame nature of tragedy (no violence, for example, occurs onstage), the sometimes scatological and frankly sexual humor of plays like *Lysistrata*, which enacts a sex strike by the women of Greece to stop the war between Athens and Sparta, shocks even some moderns. Barring criticism of democracy itself, comic playwrights knew few bounds in questioning the sexual behavior of Athenian political leaders (*Acharnians*) or popular tragedians (*Women at the Thesmophoria*), the motives of leading intellectuals (*Clouds*) or even the wisdom of Athenian men (*Lysistrata*); and this they did with the objects of their ridicule right there in the audience.⁴⁶

This tradition of literary innovation and questioning was not limited to poetry, public performance, and song; it was also to be found in the prose works – a relatively recent literary development itself – of the great historians Herodotus and Thucydides. Taking their start from Ionian philosophers seeking rational, non-theological explanations to phenomena in nature, by the end of the sixth century a number of writers began attempting to understand the world's geography and even to rationalize the bewildering mythological stories of gods and heroes that populated the Greek understanding of the past. Some of these logographers and mythographers like the Athenian

45 Robert W. Wallace, "Damon of Oa: A Music Theorist Ostracized?" in Penelope Murray and Peter J. Wilson (eds.), *Music and the Muses: The Culture of Mousike in the Classical Athenian City* (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 249–67.

46 Jeffrey S. Rusten, *The Birth of Comedy* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), pp. 16–26.

Pherecydes wrote about more recent events and even connected living individuals to ancestors from the mythical past.⁴⁷ Herodotus (c. 484–25 BCE) of Halicarnassus near Ionia, however, wrote an account of the Persian Wars that moved the Greek understanding of the past to a new level. This work was not merely an account of the conflict but a set of his *historiai*, or researches, providing the reader with a wealth of ethnographic and geographic material in addition to accounts of the early political and social history of Persia, Lydia, Sparta, and of course Athens, where he may have gained much of his knowledge of the Greek world. Not only did he throw a wide net in gathering and setting forth his material, but he presented multiple accounts of what he learned, sometimes sifting between conflicting evidence and at other times leaving it to his reader to decide. Imperfect and unsatisfying to modern scholars as he can be, Herodotus points the way to a critical analysis of the evidence of what happened in the past; and, if we choose to believe the anecdotes of later biographers, he inspired the Athenian politician/general Thucydides (c. 460–395 BCE) to embark on the writing of the major conflict of his day.⁴⁸

Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War differed from Herodotus' in some profound ways. He began writing an account of his subject from its beginning, and he himself participated in the war as an Athenian general, who was exiled by the people for his perceived failure on the battlefield. He tells us something of his methodology for constructing his narrative and for composing the majestic speeches that punctuate his story; however, he rarely tells us who his sources are and seldom provides conflicting accounts. His drier prose style and eschewing of myth and anecdote have often led scholars to see him as objective and dispassionate; however, his biases toward politicians like Pericles and against Cleon are hardly well hidden. Moreover, while for Herodotus retribution for injustices explains human events, Thucydides has a deeper and darker diagnosis of human nature that he sees as valid "for all time." Influenced by the early medical writers of his day, Thucydides elevated the historian to a sort of physician of the human condition, which became an influential model for many historians to come.⁴⁹

47 W. Morison, "Pherekydes of Athens (3)," in *Brill's New Jacoby* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy.gusu.edu/entries/brill-s-new-jacoby/pherekydes-of-athens-3-a3?s.num=4>.

48 David Asheri, Alan B. Lloyd, and Aldo Corcella, *A Commentary on Herodotus Books 1–1v* (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 3–11 and 55–56.

49 Roberto Nicolai, "Thucydides Continued," in Antonios Regakos and Antonis Tsakmakis (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Thucydides* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 710–19, and Luciano Canfora, "Thucydides in Rome and Late Antiquity," in Regakos and Tsakmakis (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Thucydides*, pp. 721–53.

At the end of the fifth century BCE, two other new genres that grew up in Athens and flourished into the fourth century were the philosophical dialogue and speeches. Although the Greek love of oratory may be traced back to Homer, it was with the sophistic movement that close analysis and construction of all types of rhetoric from political speeches to courtroom pleadings and even to epideictic (display) works began. With a close attention to the rhythms of language, avoidance of hiatus, word choice, and the proper use of metaphor and simile, Athenian writers such as Lysias (c. 445–380 BCE) and politicians like Demosthenes (384–322 BCE) in the fourth century would create masterpieces of persuasive speech.⁵⁰ Arguably the greatest writer of Athenian prose was not an orator – in fact he railed against rhetoric for its amorality – but the philosopher Plato, whose dialogues represented both compelling vignettes of intellectual life in late fifth-century Athens and powerful literary pieces⁵¹ depicting the heroic struggle of his protagonist Socrates to save his fellow Athenians from thinking that they knew what they did not – something for which an Athenian jury repaid him with a sentence of death.

Connections with the world at large

Both in its own time and in the nearly two-and-a-half millennia that have followed, Athens has had an impact far greater than its size. While its military might extended the power of a democratic empire across the Aegean and into the Mediterranean world, the immense influence of the city's artistic, literary, and intellectual forces would have an even greater impact.

With the defeat of a Persian army at Marathon in 490 BCE, Athens leapt onto the world stage. The Athenian Empire of the fifth century BCE pushed Persia, the world superpower of the time, out of parts of the Aegean Sea and even destabilized Persian control over Egypt by midcentury. However, conflict with Sparta and its allies led to a disastrous collapse of Athenian power and even a brief collapse of the democracy in 404–403 BCE. The city's fortunes would rise again during the fourth century, but gone were the days of unbridled Athenian daring and opposition to tyranny. Indeed, the Athenian failure to stand up effectively to the rise of the power-hungry dynast Philip II of Macedon would herald the end of the era of independent city-states in the Greek world at the Battle of Chaeronea in 338 BCE.

50 Stephen Usher, *Greek Oratory: Tradition and Originality* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

51 Mary Margaret McCabe, "Form and the Platonic Dialogues," in Hugh H. Benson (ed.), *A Companion to Plato* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 39–54.

The new political realities created by Philip opened the door for the meteoric rise of his son Alexander III of Macedon (356–323 BCE), whose conquest of the Persian Empire spread Hellenism as far as Central Asia and into the Indian subcontinent. Although Alexander visited Athens only once, through his tutor Aristotle he was greatly affected by the city's intellectual movements. Taking with him scientists and scholars, the Macedonian king wanted to record all that was possible of the lands and peoples he was bringing under his rule. Athens also at times was found useful as a propaganda tool, such as in Alexander's claim that the fiery destruction of the Great King's palace at Persepolis was in revenge for the burning of the Acropolis more than a century earlier.⁵² Here, then, one sees the beginning of a conception of Athens as an idea that went beyond a mere physical place.

Indeed, it was in Alexandria in Ptolemaic Egypt that scholars working in the new library, which had fast become the center of learning in the Mediterranean world, established the precedence of Athenian literature and with it Attic Greek over all others. Although differences in dialect would continue in the vastness of the Greek world, the language of classical Athens (fifth to fourth century BCE) now became fixed as the standard for what educated Greeks used to write their treatises, histories, speeches, and poetry – a practice that would continue for nearly two millennia after the Athenian navy had last plied the waves of the Aegean.⁵³

This adoption of Athenian literature and learning continued well throughout Rome's heyday, in no small part because by the second and first centuries BCE Athens had become a college town populated with the children of the wealthy from across the Mediterranean taking classes in its various philosophical schools.⁵⁴ As a result the city had, to paraphrase Pericles' boast, become an education for the entire Mediterranean world. The plays of the great Athenian playwrights continued to be performed and read in the schools – the survival of many of these dramas was dependent on these selections – and it was the Athenian orations of Demosthenes, Lysias, and many others that continued to be read and imitated centuries after Athens' democracy had ceased to function. An example of this sort of

52 Ian Worthington, *Alexander the Great* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2004), pp. 110–11.

53 Geoffrey C. Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and Its Speakers* (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 151–53.

54 Christian Habicht, *Athens from Alexander to Antony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 105–11.

emulation may be seen in the twelfth-century CE *Alexiad* of Anna Comnena, whose approach to history was profoundly indebted to Thucydides and whose Greek would have seemed quite contemporary to an Athenian living 1,500 years earlier.

Athenian art and architecture also had a lasting impact across the Mediterranean. Wealthy Romans, for instance, not only sent their children to Athens for higher education but also brought back a great many works of art from Greece, incorporating them into their burgeoning empire. Athens, in particular, was a target for these sorts of depredations, especially with the sack of the city by the Roman general Sulla in 86 BC. Not only were the Roman elite interested in decorating their gardens, but in addition, Athens had now come to represent high culture and dynamism. This was so much the case that echoes of Athenian art are abundantly evident in the artistic propaganda initiated by Augustus, Rome's first emperor.⁵⁵

The identification of Athens with the high culture of the ancient world was not without controversy and became a matter of debate within the early Christian church. Some early Christian apologists like Tertullian completely rejected everything but scripture, while others believed that a middle ground might be found. While some literary texts were lost as a result, more simply ceased to be copied as a result of the tremendous political and social upheavals of the middle of the first millennium. As the Roman Empire in the West was transformed into a series of Germanic kingdoms in the fifth century CE and Byzantine power contracted dramatically during the centuries that followed, Greek literature virtually disappeared from Western Europe.⁵⁶ In the Christian East, however, some pagans like Socrates and Plato were made Christian saints, and the privileged position of Athens meant that more of its literary output survived.⁵⁷ Christians were not the only monotheists who saw value in their pagan predecessors, and with the rise of the Islamic Empire the works of Aristotle and other scientists became especially important and were translated into Arabic (indeed in some cases the original Greek texts are entirely lost to us).⁵⁸

It would be through this Arabic connection – particularly through the great centers of learning in Islamic Spain and with the renewed connections

55 J. C. Edmondson, *Augustus* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 323–25.

56 L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars* (Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 118–19.

57 Reynolds and Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, pp. 44–78.

58 Reynolds and Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, pp. 120–21.

that came with the Crusades in the twelfth century CE that the West became reacquainted with Aristotle, who along with other great thinkers of the Greco-Roman world would spark first the Renaissance and later the Enlightenment in Europe. At the core of these great and complex movements or art, literature, and thought were an active engagement with or a reaction against the culture of classical Athens. For good or ill, Athenian art and architecture became representative of an ideal for painters and builders during the Renaissance and Enlightenment, while later modern artists have actively sought to distance themselves from this heritage. The moral, ethical, and metaphysical ideas of Socrates and Plato have profoundly shaped western philosophy, and an analytical approach to the study of the past also begins in Athens, as do the traditions of dramatic performance in the West.

Even our understanding of what Athens means has changed over time. In the 1700s the Athenian democracy was emblematic for Enlightenment thinkers of what might be best understood as mob rule; hence, the founders of a new nation in North America were careful to call their new polity a Republic, which adorned itself more with Roman imagery and titles than Greek.⁵⁹ It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that the Liberal politician and historian George Grote would write a monumental *History of Greece* that would restore a greater luster to Athenian democratic values.⁶⁰

Since the end of World War II, an idealized portrait of ancient Athens has fallen away considerably. Historical research has balanced the city's substantial achievements in literature, politics, and architecture with new lines of inquiry examining the lives of women and noncitizens in a society that disenfranchised them and studying the brutal system of chattel slavery that supported the whole edifice. Working to understand this more clearly, social historians continue to explode many old myths, and literary theorists open many new horizons on old texts that find new audiences in ways that probably would have surprised and even shocked their authors – feminist readings of *Antigone*, for example, surely would have floored the conservative Sophocles. Without question Athens continues to have an impact far beyond its place or time.

59 Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 57–72 and 237.

60 George Grote, *A History of Greece* (London: J. Murray, 1888), and John Vaio, “George Grote,” in Ward W. Briggs and William M. Calder (eds.), *Classical Scholarship* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), pp. 121–22.

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Late antiquity in Europe c. 300–900 CE

CHARLES F. PAZDERNIK

Constantinople as a witness to world history

The city of Constantinople, among the most distinctive and consequential European creations of late antiquity, presents itself as a witness to the various transformations that take place between the fourth and the ninth centuries CE. The city's fortunes provide one among many threads that lend coherence to the period as a whole and usefully interrogate the validity of "Europe" as a geopolitical concept at this point in history.

Founded on the old Greek city of Byzantium on the European side of the Bosphorus, Constantinople took its name as "Constantine's city" (Greek *Kōnstantinoupolis*, modern Istanbul) from the emperor Constantine I (r. 306–337 CE), who dedicated it in 330. The development of the city's identity as a second or "new" Rome (*nea Rhômê*) owes much to the decision of Constantius II, one of Constantine's sons and successors (r. 337–361), to elevate its senate to a level of parity with that of Rome itself, as well as to the inclination of subsequent emperors to embellish the city and to distinguish it from other great cities in the eastern Mediterranean. The mutual involvement of the governing structures of the empire with those of the Christian churches, consequent upon Constantine's adoption of Christianity as his personal religion, accounts for the ecclesiastical recognition, by the orthodox ecumenical council of Constantinople in 381, of that city's bishop, or Patriarch, as second in precedence to the Pope in Rome and above the Patriarchs of Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria. The construction of its massive fortifications early in the fifth century at the behest of Theodosius II (r. 408–450) ensured that the eastern capital, by now firmly established as the seat of emperors, would withstand sieges and assaults throughout our period even as the empire itself became drastically diminished.

In the fourth century, the city of Rome retained its prestige as the head of empire and remained the home of a fabulously rich aristocracy with

landholdings across the Mediterranean. Its population of probably half a million depended upon the importation of foodstuffs from north Africa, while Constantine had provided for the provisioning of Constantinople from Egypt. As security concerns in the west drew emperors closer to the frontiers, however, Rome lost its role as an imperial residence. In 476, following sacks by the Goths in 410 and the Vandals in 455, it was incorporated into the post-Roman kingdom of Italy. In the sixth century armies of the emperor Justinian (r. 527–565), resident in Constantinople, recaptured it in a much-reduced state and incorporated it within the provincial administration of the eastern empire. Even after eastern power receded, Rome remained both a center of consumption and trade in Italy and the seat of the papacy at the head of the western Christian churches, but the city's security would depend upon outside powers down to the end of our period.

Justinian's spectacular rebuilding of the great church of Hagia Sophia sealed Constantinople's status as the greatest city of the age. After its sixth-century apogee, however, in the face of military and natural disasters and desperate sieges in the seventh and eighth centuries, the city appears as a shadow of its former self, its Greco-Roman amenities and monuments neglected and abandoned, its population decimated, the imperial pretensions of its rulers controverted. In the ninth century, military and economic recovery set the stage for the distinctive political and cultural achievements of the middle Byzantine period through to the thirteenth century, while the intellectual and literary accomplishments of figures such as the patriarch Photios I of Constantinople (d. c. 893) testify to the preservation, cultivation, and adaptation of classical learning.

In spite of – or, indeed, because of – these vicissitudes, Constantinople occupied a singular place in the minds of outsiders as well as those of its inhabitants. Its capacity to withstand sieges and secular reverses vindicated it as a God-protected city, a place of immanent holiness enjoying the special protection of the Mother of God and housing a fantastic array of sacred relics and miraculous objects. Ceremonial formality and elaborately staged spectacle enhanced the transcendent mystery and ineffable majesty of the imperial office. Byzantine silks (themselves embroidered with Roman, Sasanian, and Islamic imagery) and other precious objects, manufactured in carefully regulated Constantinopolitan workshops, adorned palaces and treasuries throughout Europe and the Near East. Such tokens of prestige served as the currency of diplomacy and instruments of soft power, providing an alternative to – or masking the absence of – coercive power and displaying aesthetic and technical excellence to the world as hallmarks of spiritual and temporal authority.

Byzantine emperors were hardly unique among late antique monarchs in claiming the special favor of divinity and aspects of sacrality. Indeed, the embrace of monotheism and universalist aspirations to imperial dominion by great powers is one of the distinctive aspects of the period. At the same time, Constantinople's identity as simultaneously a concrete place and an endlessly reimaginable and recoverable idea provides a point of intersection between the realia of material and cultural artifacts and their interrelationships, on the one hand, and the mentalities and ideologies that animate civilizations, on the other.¹ The following discussion, owing to limitations of space and an attempt to trace patterns of development across a broad span of space and time, will concentrate on the former rather more than the latter, as a result of which the centuries under examination may seem to pale in comparison with those on either side of them. The lived experiences of individuals in discrete circumstances are shaped by much more limited horizons.² Late antiquity is avowedly a study of reaction, accommodation, and adaptation in the face of changes that might have seemed inexplicable, on account of their scale, or imperceptible, on account of their slow and subtle unfolding, to those who experienced them at the time. Such a study requires, and rewards, the close and careful analysis of invariably fragmentary and limited evidence, but such an analysis relies, implicitly or otherwise, upon ideas and assumptions and approaches about the big picture that are inescapably synthetic and composite. What follows is one sketch of that big picture.

The conceptual framework

For the purposes of this discussion, the coherence of both "late antiquity" as a periodization and "Europe" as a geographical focus requires explanation, and explicitly positing and problematizing them as choices is a useful exercise.

Recapitulating the development of late antiquity as a field of study lies beyond our scope, but it should be observed that the period as it has been defined here – 300–900 CE – corresponds neither to Peter Brown's "long" late antiquity (150–750 CE in *The World of Late Antiquity* [1971])³ nor to the period of

1 Compare Bryan Ward-Perkins, "Constantinople: A City and its Ideological Territory," in Gian Pietro Brogiolo, Nancy Gauthier, and Neil J. Christie (eds.), *Towns and Their Territories between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (Transformation of the Roman World)* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), vol. 1x, pp. 325–45.

2 On cultural history in western Europe, see Julia M. H. Smith, *Europe after Rome: A New Cultural History 500–1000* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

3 Compare Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, AD 200–1000* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

the “later Roman empire” as defined by A. H. M. Jones (284–602 CE in *The Later Roman Empire: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey* [1964]) and others. Nor does it conform, for that matter, to Chris Wickham’s *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (400–800 CE [2005]) or *The Inheritance of Rome* (400–1000 CE [2009]). The periodization adopted here is, in the first place, self-evidently bounded by a pair of rounded numbers that lends itself to a more or less straightforward century-by-century survey without, one hopes, falling into a facile over-schematization: the varying pace of events and their effects across space and time will become apparent. Second, the starting point usefully fudges the vitally important reigns of the emperors Diocletian (r. 284–305) and Constantine I while firmly establishing the fourth century as a turning point. Third, the ending point gets us more or less to the end of the Carolingian dynasty and well within the middle Byzantine resurgence and the fragmentation of the Abbasid caliphate, offering a rough conspectus of the three principal European powers of the time at key points of inflection.

Traditionally, economic and political historians distinguished “the end of antiquity” from “the birth of Europe,” coinciding with a shift from a so-called ancient mode of production based upon slaveholding to the feudalism of the high middle ages, that was completed by the end of the tenth century. The interstitial period, more or less overlapping with ours, was characterized as a time of cultural and economic backwardness – the “dark ages” – in which production and consumption was isolated within the closed and self-sufficient estates of entrenched aristocrats in western Europe. More recent work has emphasized the role of such estates as centers of both production and demand that stimulated the development of new networks of interregional exchange across Europe and beyond.⁴ Moreover, it is increasingly appreciated that the end of antiquity was in no sense a unitary phenomenon. Even as Roman imperial authority was disintegrating in the western Mediterranean in the fifth century, the east continued to enjoy unprecedented levels of prosperity well into the sixth, characterized by the intensification of agricultural production and polycentric patterns of exchange that sustained a pan-Mediterranean commercial network down to the turn of the eighth century. The Roman state interacted, furthermore, with a range of societies on its peripheries, including a well-organized empire in Mesopotamia and Persia, with which its fortunes were closely linked.

4 Adriaan Verhulst, *The Carolingian Economy* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), and Jean-Pierre Devroey, *Économie rurale et société dans l’Europe franque (VIe–IXe siècles)* (Paris: Ed. Belin, 2003).

Late antiquity, especially as it relates to Europe, may accordingly be characterized as a period of disruption, transition, and transformation away from a Mediterranean-centered, late Roman imperial political and socio-economic order, the effects of which were experienced differently in the various post-Roman successor states that developed both within and beyond former, centrally administered imperial territories. On a cultural and ideological level, each of these successor states constructed greater or lesser perceptions of continuity with the Roman imperial past in proportion to the instrumental value they identified in perpetuating or rediscovering Greco-Roman literary and material culture and imperial institutions and infrastructure.

What may usefully be compared across these differentiated experiences and contexts is the manner in which each polity successfully extracted and concentrated the surplus production of a more or less comprehensively mobilized and exploited agricultural peasantry in order to maintain order, to develop and sustain elite patterns of consumption and ideological self-fashioning, and to aggrandize itself at the expense of competing polities. The late Roman fiscal system, which organized and directed the productive capacities of its preindustrial Mediterranean heartland to an unprecedented extent,⁵ supplies not only the baseline of such a comparison but also the material conditions which precipitated its own collapse, as outsiders attracted by the relatively greater prospects for wealth and advancement within the empire bid with varying degrees of success for their share of the bounty.

If, then, the validity of late antiquity as a period of study can be accepted at least provisionally, perhaps it can be admitted more frankly that the choice of Europe as a geographical focus for this discussion is, at root, arbitrary: at no point in the period is Europe, however it might be defined, a politically, culturally, or economically coherent entity. The historiologically salient point is, instead, that the western Eurasian landmass is the area, and these are the centuries, in which so many nationalist ideologies contributing to the overarching story of “the birth of Europe” are situated.⁶ Acknowledging the accumulated baggage of so much of European history, as it has traditionally been framed, is perhaps the only justification for including a contribution on late antiquity “in Europe” in a twenty-first-century history of the world.

5 Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

6 Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton University Press, 2002).

As a response to retrospective and teleological narratives that have attempted to recover the origins of modern national identities in the post-Roman European centuries, attention to regional development and variation has become increasingly pronounced in late antique and early medieval studies. The expectation of, and appreciation for, differences has to inform any attempt to understand the period.

The Roman empire in the fourth century

While the Roman imperial order grew to embrace the entire Mediterranean basin – something never accomplished before or since – at no point in time did it comprehend the whole of Europe. Among the most consequential developments between the fourth and the ninth centuries CE were the reordering of political and economic relationships around the Mediterranean and, consequently, the development of new relationships linking formerly Roman territories with those beyond (see Map 14.1). Above all it was the Roman fiscal system, with its stimulative and capillary effects in extracting surplus and redistributing resources toward the imperial capitals and the frontiers, that accounted for the empire's resilience and success.

At the beginning of the fourth century, central authority had been re-established over the empire's traditional territories following a period of political, military, and economic disorganization in the third century. The frontier swept from Hadrian's Wall in Britain into continental Europe along a line defined for the most part by the Rhine and Danube rivers, thence into Asia Minor and Syria and Palestine within a contested eastern boundary in Mesopotamia, and back to include Egypt and the coastal plains of north Africa. Frontiers were zones of cultural and economic interaction rather than exclusionary defensive lines.⁷ Beyond the provinces they governed directly, the Romans cultivated buffer zones of client kingdoms which acknowledged imperial suzerainty in return for access to markets and the prestige accruing from diplomatic recognition. Along the northern and southern frontiers, the empire confronted outsiders, so-called "barbarians" (originally from the Greek *barbaros*, literally a speaker of gibberish), who were comparatively less organized and economically developed: for the most part, Iron Age agriculturalists to the north and pastoralists to the south. Beyond the

7 C. R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).



Map 14.1 Europe and the Mediterranean in the third century

northern buffer zone, the Romans interacted indirectly with populations known to them chiefly as producers of raw materials such as amber and slaves and as objects of ethnographic speculation. In the east, in contrast, the empire sometimes contended and sometimes cooperated with a sophisticated and formidable territorial power – from the mid-third century, the Persian empire ruled by the Sasanian dynasty – which provided a geopolitical, economic, and cultural counterweight.

The Roman state was organized around a network of some 2,000 cities, supported by a fiscal system capable of gathering and concentrating agricultural commodities in bulk and distributing them over vast distances in order to feed urban populations and to supply troops on the frontiers. Taxes and rents underwrote an urban civilization that channeled elite consumption and competitive display toward the provision of amenities such as the bread dole, the provision of spectacles in theaters and amphitheaters, baths, and monumental public spaces. Communication by sea and riverine waterways facilitated the interregional transport of goods in bulk, enabling north African and Egyptian grain to feed Rome and Constantinople, respectively, while the southern Aegean and northern Italy provisioned garrisons along the northern frontier. Beyond that frontier there was nothing comparable in Europe.

Imperial government aimed at extracting revenues with a minimum of effort. Tax collection had long been in the hands of local elites, whose service as town councilors (*curiales*) and standing in their communities buttressed the system as a whole. The direction of taxation, in contrast, was controlled by centrally appointed, salaried officials. Recovering from the disorders of the third century obliged Diocletian and Constantine to undertake measures that increased outlay by expanding the imperial administration and the army. The threat from the militarily effective Sasanians in the east and the emergence of better-organized and more sophisticated groups in the north demanded the consolidation of the tax base and a larger share of the agricultural surplus. Standardized modes of registration and assessment were introduced, both monetary taxes and deliveries in kind (some increasingly commuted into gold as time went on) were levied, and all of these revenues flowed from the localities to centrally appointed provincial governors and then to the four great praetorian prefects, who by now were civilian fiscal and judicial officers responsible for sustaining an army of perhaps 600,000 men and more than 30,000 imperial officials.

Effective central control depended upon the fact that soldiers and officials were paid by the state and dependent upon the imperial fiscal system. The officials of the imperial administration were a self-regarding elite steeped in

the traditional Greco-Roman literary and rhetorical education, whose outlook, like that of Roman elites in prior centuries, remained fundamentally civilian. Successful military power-brokers, such as the soldier-emperors of the third and fourth centuries and the generalissimos who ruled in the name of juvenile or ineffective emperors thereafter, succeeded infrequently in devolving their influence upon their children, who in any event were raised as civilians.⁸

The expansion of the late Roman state apparatus and its increasing claim upon the economy have traditionally been seen as causes of economic crisis and decline. Yet economic activity in late antiquity was remarkably dynamic and widely diffused, and many places within the empire reached unprecedented levels of development in the period. The ability of the imperial government to meet pressing needs by linking centers of production with centers of consumption across the Mediterranean and beyond facilitated the expansion of distribution networks and stimulated the development of markets. The infrastructure underwritten and guaranteed by the state for the transportation of public goods from tax-exporting to tax-importing areas could be exploited for private interregional commerce by producers of surpluses in excess of their fiscal obligations, manufacturers of specialty goods, and exporters of high-demand local foodstuffs, piggybacking on the late Roman “tax spine” or “tributary nexus.”⁹

At the same time, commercial expansion and economic development driven by mercantilist motives were far from the horizon of imperial authorities. At root the Roman order fostered and protected a highly stratified social structure that supported the distinctive, urban-centered lifestyle of a pan-Mediterranean, Greco-Roman elite. Its members, whose wealth was invested in landholding on a local or interregional scale, as the case might be, cooperated with and were coopted by that order as a result of acculturation and the tangible benefits they received, far more than the sheer coercive power of the state. The price these elites paid in return was the share of extractable surplus generated by their landholdings that was captured by the state as taxation rather than by themselves in rents. The empire persisted where, and as long as, this value proposition remained an attractive one.

In late antiquity imperial government was more assertive and capable than ever before, though its resources and reach were paltry in comparison with

8 See Chris Wickham, “Tributary Empires: Late Rome and the Arab Caliphate,” in Peter F. Bang and Christopher A. Bayly (eds.), *Tributary Empires in Global History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 208–11; also Meaghan A. McEvoy, *Child Emperor Rule in the Late Roman West, AD 367–455* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

9 Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*.

those of the modern bureaucratic state. Threats to the fiscal integrity of the empire eroded the power of central authority and, if left unchecked, contributed to an accelerating spiral of decline. Third-century disorders had demonstrated the empire's tendency toward fragmentation and localization, which was arrested and reversed in the fourth by the strong and effective reassertion of central control. The breakdown of the late Roman fiscal system beginning in the west in the fifth century is attributable not only to mounting external challenges but also to the ability of local landowning elites to dispense with imperial government while accommodating themselves to new realities on the ground.

Exogenous shock as an explanation for fifth-century collapse

By the end of the fifth century, central imperial authority west of a line running roughly from Serbia to Cyrenaica had been effectively supplanted by a number of successor states ruled by military elites who traced their origins beyond the former northern frontier and whose identities had been forged in a long process of confrontation and accommodation with Roman authorities. The eastern half of the empire, in contrast, remained intact and securely within the control of an emperor seated in Constantinople.

Any explanation of "the fall of the Roman empire" must account for these divergent outcomes, in which geopolitics figures prominently. Its comparatively less exposed position with respect to the northern frontier equipped the east to weather, and to some extent to deflect upon the west, incursions by semi-peripheral outsiders seeking places for themselves within the empire. The destabilization of that frontier has been described as a series of exogenous "shocks" that led to the collapse of central authority in the west while leaving some landowning elites and some local and regional Roman institutions intact.¹⁰

Structural changes in the fifth and sixth centuries also altered relationships between the central government and localities. The expansion of the imperial administration represented an attempt by the state not only to extend its reach but also to conciliate and to coopt local elites, who were offered official titles and salaries, carefully graduated orders of rank and precedence, tax advantages, and exemptions from service on town councils. Advancement in

¹⁰ Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

imperial service became correspondingly more attractive than traditional forms of elite competition and display at home. The fortunes of the curial class as a whole suffered as more ambitious local elites evaded its obligations. Increasingly the central government interacted with groups of *de facto* local notables, including great landowners and bishops, and dispatched its own officials into the localities. Tax collection remained dependent upon the cooperation of landowners, whose incentives to enlarge their holdings and patronage by sheltering their dependants from fiscal obligations increased in line with their capacity to resist state interference.

The fiscal system withstood these changes until it was disrupted in the west in the fifth century and in the east in the seventh. The severing of trans-Mediterranean links between tax-exporting and tax-receiving provinces effected an economic contraction, the extent of which varied dramatically from region to region, and altered the basis of interactions between the rulers of post-Roman successor states, some of which lost the power to tax altogether, and their landowning elites.

In the west these included kingdoms of Vandals and Alans in north Africa, Ostrogoths in Italy, Sueves in northwestern Spain, Visigoths elsewhere in Spain and in southwestern Gaul, Burgundians in southeastern Gaul, Franks in northern Gaul, and Anglo-Saxons in Britain. All of these newcomers represented a small minority of the total population. The manner in which they exploited economic assets within the successor kingdoms remains a controversial and much-discussed issue.¹¹ Outright expropriation undoubtedly did take place, but other, less disruptive, approaches were available, such as rewarding supporters by allocating to them directly a share of the revenues formerly captured by the imperial center. In much of the west, the impact of the newcomers would have been experienced most directly in the particular and limited areas in which they established themselves. Drastic changes at the level of high politics threaten to obscure appreciable continuities in other aspects of life, however profound the cumulative effects became in the long run.

Outcomes varied. By the end of the sixth century, patterns of landholding in northern Gaul and post-Roman Britain had been wholly altered, shaping and reflecting the composition of a new or reconfigured landholding elite. Elsewhere in Gaul, in Italy, and in north Africa, landed assets remained more intact, offering evidence of accommodation between newcomers and indigenous landowners and indicating the persistence of Roman culture and

¹¹ Notably Walter A. Goffart, *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); compare Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

some institutions. In those successor states with the most staying power, formal distinctions initially observed between newcomers and local populations faded with the passage of time. While Theoderic exercised jurisdiction in late fifth-century Italy over both Goths and Romans, by the late seventh century "everyone in northern France was considered a Frank."¹²

Relationships between the Roman empire and groups on the other side of the northern frontier were conditioned by the stimulative effect of stationing troops there between the first and fourth centuries CE. Access to the relatively developed Roman economy and to opportunities created by contact with imperial authorities encouraged groups to organize themselves in order to garner rewards and to advance their interests at the expense of others. Achieving the scale needed at first to win recognition from the Roman state, and eventually to resist and undermine it, favored the growth and consolidation of militarized coalitions or confederations organized under effective leaders. Such experiences characterize many of the groups that eventually founded successor states in the post-Roman west. Key to their resilience was their capacity to incorporate themselves into new and larger groupings, sustained by access to the wealth of the Roman world, with whom imperial authorities and local elites had little choice other than to reach an accommodation.

External pressure along the northern frontier, coupled with strategic miscalculations and political disorder within the Roman empire between the last quarter of the fourth century and the first third of the fifth, contributed to growing instability and led to the settlement of largely autonomous groups of outsiders upon Roman territory, effectively removing key provinces from imperial control. The coalition under the leadership of Alaric (r. 395–410) which moved around the Balkans and twice into Italy, sacking the city of Rome in 410, might have included among many others elements of Germanic-speaking Gothic groups who had crossed the lower Danube and annihilated the emperor Valens (r. 364–378) with his field army at the battle of Adrianople in 378. Alaric himself had led allied Gothic forces in support of the emperor Theodosius I (r. 378–395) at the battle of the Frigidus in 394. Following the settlement of Alaric's successors in southern Gaul in 418, the Visigothic kingdom emerged as a key player in imperial politics in the second half of the century. In 429 a group of Germanic-speaking Vandals and Iranian-speaking Alans, part of a larger alliance that had crossed the upper Rhine in 406 and established themselves in Spain by 412, crossed the Strait of Gibraltar

12 Walter Scheidel, "Fiscal Regimes and the 'First Great Divergence' between Eastern and Western Eurasia," in Bang and Bayly (eds.), *Tributary Empires*, p. 200.

under their king Geiseric (r. 428–477) and occupied Roman north Africa, capturing Carthage in 439 and sacking Rome itself in 455.

These movements have been plausibly interpreted as responses initiated by pressure from the Huns,¹³ originally nomadic horsemen from the Eurasian steppe, who are attested raiding the east Roman and Persian empires through the Caucasus in 395 and were newly arrived on the middle Danube in c. 411. By the mid-440s they were effectively united at the head of a large, heterogeneous, and involuntary confederation under the leadership of Attila (r. 434–453), whose growing power inspired attacks on the Balkans and invasions of Gaul and Italy in 451 and 452. His death in 453 precipitated the collapse of Hunnic hegemony in the middle Danube region and the dissolution of his confederation.

Various coalitions emerged in the aftermath of the Hunnic collapse. Germanic-speaking Sciri entered the western Roman empire in c. 469, including Odoacer/Odovacar, who made himself ruler of Italy from 476 (d. 493). Goths united under the incipient Amal dynasty entered the east Roman Balkans in c. 473. Their king, Theoderic, at the suggestion of the eastern emperor Zeno (r. 474–491), led them, with subsequent accretions, into Italy in 488, eliminated Odovacar, and established the Ostrogothic kingdom (r. 493–526). By 511 Theoderic had made himself sole ruler of both the Visigothic and Ostrogothic kingdoms. Throughout his reign he governed in a manner that preserved and appropriated Roman customs and institutions and acknowledged the authority of the imperial seat at Constantinople.

The eastern empire, its revenues secure, proved capable of absorbing incursions into the Balkans and reestablishing its European frontiers once Hunnic power had collapsed. The outsiders found easier pickings in the west, as a result of which perhaps half of its tax base had been eroded by the middle of the fifth century, at which point resources were simply unavailing to counter ongoing threats. Most decisive of all, notwithstanding the depredations of the Huns in the Balkans and beyond, was the loss of the western empire's richest provinces, in north Africa, to the Vandals and Alans in the 440s. The gravity of the situation is demonstrated by the efforts of the western and eastern courts in mounting costly maritime expeditions between the early 440s and the late 460s, which failed to dislodge the invaders. Faced with the ebbing of central authority, local populations did their best to seek a *modus vivendi* with the newcomers in their midst.

13 Now especially Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*; compare Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376–568* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Sixth- and seventh-century upheavals

Attempts in the sixth century to regain lost Roman territories in the western Mediterranean achieved limited success. The eastern emperor Justinian I, exploiting dynastic struggles in north Africa and Italy, destroyed the kingdom of the Vandals and Alans in 534 and that of the Ostrogoths, following twenty years of fighting, in 552; subsequently he established a toehold in the south of Spain. These interventions reestablished, for the time being, interregional distribution networks in western Europe for goods from Syria-Palestine and north Africa, but they were predicated upon a volatile strategic balance with the Sasanian empire in the east. Recrudescence of hostility with Persia, coupled with natural disasters and a virulent outbreak of plague, straitened the resources at Justinian's disposal, and in the following century the east Roman state faced existential challenges, exacerbated by civil war, from Persians, Avars, and Slavs, and most importantly Arabs.

Following catastrophic Sasanian incursions early in the seventh century and the Persian-Avar siege of Constantinople in 626, the emperor Heraclius (r. 610–641) campaigned through Armenia into Mesopotamia and brought Persia to the brink of collapse, recovering most of the empire. Arab groups had long been employed as clients by either side, and now the exhaustion of the two great powers opened the way for their advance under the unifying impetus of Islam. By the end of Heraclius' reign, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt had once again been lost and Asia Minor imperiled, and by 652 the Persian empire had been subsumed within an Islamic empire stretching by the early eighth century from northern India to Spain. The breaking of the first Arab siege of Constantinople from 674–678 checked the ambitions of the incipient Umayyad dynasty and offered a respite.

The loss of Egypt in particular, first to the Sasanians for the decade before 629 and then to the Arabs permanently after 641, delivered a blow comparable to the conquest of north Africa by the Vandals, dismantling the pan-Mediterranean Roman fiscal system once and for all. Not only was Alexandria in Egypt politically and fiscally severed from Constantinople, but so too was Byzantine Carthage in north Africa, from which Heraclius had launched his bid for imperial power, Antioch in Syria, and Jerusalem in Palestine. Interregional exchange of foodstuffs and manufactured goods persisted until the end of the seventh century, as distributions of the ceramic storage vessels known as amphorae and north African fine wares demonstrate. A decisive change becomes evident, however, in the decades around 700 CE. The earlier of two well-dated ceramic assemblages from the Crypta Balbi in

Rome indicates the availability of African and eastern imports in some quantity around 690, while the later deposit, around 720, contains scarcely any items originating outside of Italy or Sicily.¹⁴

The erosion of interregional exchange apparent after 700 contributed to economic contraction, making elites less wealthy in general and leading to the regionalization and simplification of material culture. Rulers enjoyed greater autonomy in states in which elite status was determined by access to centrally controlled resources, such as offices and salaries, and were correspondingly more dependent upon cooperation in others in which elites controlled resources of their own and effectively dominated localities.

The western post-Roman successor states gradually lost the ability to register and tax their subjects in order to support a salaried army, resulting in political fragmentation and the de facto negotiation of power among monarchs, elite landholders, semi-independent towns, and the clergy. In no small part as a consequence of the decline of state institutions, the Christian church came to play a predominating role in the society and economy of western Europe. In contrast, both the Byzantine (to use the conventional designation of the eastern empire from these centuries onward; “Byzantines” called themselves *Rhōmaioi*, Romans) and the early Arab states retained and adapted elements of the late Roman fiscal system, albeit in diminished form. Seventh- and eighth-century Byzantium struggled to maintain itself on a sharply reduced territorial basis, while tax collection and military organization in the Syria-based Umayyad dynasty (661–750 CE) was devolved upon the provinces, keeping a large share of revenues there.

Post-Roman points of reference

The seventh and eighth centuries should be approached not as “dark ages” but rather as a period of dislocation and realignment leading to the emergence of three key peer polities, which in overarching terms may be identified as the empire of the Franks, the Byzantine empire, and the Caliphate, this last term designating an Islamic empire headed by a caliph or “successor” (Arabic *khalifa*) to the Prophet Muhammad as supreme religious and political leader.

¹⁴ Lucia Sagui, “Roma, i centri privilegiati e la lunga durata della tarda antichità: dati archeologici dal deposito di VII secolo nell’*esedra della Crypta Balbi*,” *Archeologia Medievale* 29 (2002): 7–42, and Simon T. Loseby, “The Ceramic Data and the Transformation of the Roman World,” in Michel Bonifay and Jean-Christopher Tréglià (eds.), *LRCW 2: Late Roman Coarse Wares, Cooking Wares and Amphorae in the Mediterranean: Archaeology and Archaeometry* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 2007), book 1662, pp. 1–14.

Each of these polities was a European power, and all in distinctive ways were both inheritors of a Roman imperial legacy and responsible for integrating post-Roman and non-Roman areas into new structures. Correspondingly, all three imperial powers influenced the development of a constellation of monarchical states in Europe stretching by the end of the ninth century well beyond erstwhile Roman territories, from the Atlantic to the Volga and from the Arctic Circle to the northern Mediterranean. Our perception of the reality of economic regression within the post-Roman world in these centuries is to some extent balanced by an appreciation of growth and development outside it, culminating in the radically transformed Christian Europe of the central middle ages. Such a perspective was, of course, unavailable to those at the time.

In the western Mediterranean the final collapse of the Roman interregional exchange system around 700 CE contributed to relative economic stagnation. In Europe effects varied from region to region. Some urban areas in former Roman territories disappeared, and many others broke up into islands of smaller settlements, separated by ruins and spaces converted into market gardens and vineyards supporting a population of hundreds or a few thousands. Christian bishops provided community leadership within an ecclesiastical network of episcopal sees that perpetuated elements of the ancient urban network on which it had been founded. Monumental architecture was largely focused upon churches, which were constructed out of materials recovered from abandoned structures. In some places private buildings encroached upon formerly public spaces, altering urban centers. In the eastern Mediterranean a much diminished Byzantine empire and a flourishing, if frangible, Islamic empire maintained coherent state structures that adapted the surviving Roman fiscal infrastructure in increasingly distinctive ways. In the meantime new exchange networks and ports of trade became established in the North Sea region.

Byzantium

While the Byzantines maintained their universalist claims to world supremacy and perpetuated late Roman cultural patterns and attitudes toward legitimacy, the rump of the eastern Roman empire, now confined to Asia Minor, the Balkans, and a diminishing presence in Italy and Sicily, had become geopolitically a regional power in the eastern Mediterranean whose fortunes were inversely correlated with those of the Islamic powers around it. The failure of the second Arab siege of Constantinople in 717–718 concluded efforts on the part of the Caliphate to capture the city in our

period, and gradually a frontier stabilized along the Taurus-Antitaurus range in southeastern Asia Minor. Ongoing threats required continual outlay on the army, in spite of the loss of two-thirds of the empire's territory and perhaps three-quarters of its revenue. Fiscal demands dictated patterns of production and distribution, while commercial activity was confined largely within localities and began to recover only in the mid-ninth century.

Political authority and social capital was concentrated in Constantinople, whose estimated population of 40,000 was reduced from perhaps half a million in the early sixth century. Centrally appointed and salaried imperial officials assessed and disbursed tax revenues, which continued to be extracted largely from agricultural production.¹⁵ In the seventh century smallholders predominated, following the diminishment of large estates, while in the eighth and ninth centuries large landowners reemerge and resume their role as fiscal intermediaries. Elites derived status not only from landholding but from the possession of imperial positions and titles, which were prerequisites for social and material advancement.

The eighth century marked in key respects a nadir in relations between the Greek east and Latin west. The introduction of iconoclasm, a rejection of the veneration of religious images, by the emperor Leo III (r. 717–741) in the late 720s was vigorously opposed by the papacy. In the face of threats from the Lombards, who had been a rising power in Italy from the end of the sixth century, Rome pursued political alignment with the Franks, who conquered the Lombard kingdom in 774. Pope Leo III's coronation of the Frankish king Charlemagne as "emperor of the Romans" in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome on Christmas Day, 800, abetted Frankish efforts to appropriate Byzantine imperial imagery. The formal renunciation of iconoclasm in the east in 843 contributed, however, to a political and ecclesiastical rapprochement between Rome and Constantinople, while dynastic instability within the Frankish kingdom at mid-century created a security vacuum in the face of Arab attacks on Italy. In the meantime Byzantine power in the central Mediterranean was on the rise and would continue to increase under the emperor Basil I (r. 867–886) and his successors in the so-called Macedonian dynasty. Diplomatic missions resumed, and by the close of the century remaining points of ecclesiastical controversy appear to have been resolved, at which point the papacy itself entered into a period of political decline.

¹⁵ John F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

The Caliphate

Both the Umayyad dynasty, centered on Damascus between the 660s and the mid-eighth century, and the Abbasid dynasty, centered on Baghdad from the later eighth century down to its disintegration in the early tenth, at the end of our period, encompassed territories and disposed of resources that surpassed those of the Roman empire at its height. The Islamic empire influenced the history of Europe in late antiquity not only directly, through its possessions in Spain and its reduction of the eastern Roman empire, but also through the influence it exercised militarily, economically, and diplomatically throughout the Mediterranean and up through the Caucasus into eastern and northern Europe.

While the Umayyads exploited the local fiscal structures they inherited from the Romans, their state differed structurally from those of the Byzantines and the Franks, respectively, in that unlike the former its ruling elite was militarized and unlike the latter its armies, on the principle of keeping Arabs separate from non-Arabs, were settled for the most part in garrison towns and salaried; correspondingly, they were discouraged from acquiring land. Until c. 700 indigenous elites in Egypt and Syria-Palestine, including principal landholders and the officials of the civil administration, remained Greek-speaking and Christian. Thereafter the Arabization of these elites proceeded apace but remained incomplete at the end of the dynasty.¹⁶

Like the Romans, the Umayyads relied upon local elites for the collection of taxes. The presence of salaried garrisons in each province ensured, however, that most state revenues were both raised and consumed at the provincial level, leaving correspondingly fewer resources available for direction and disbursement from the center. The resulting divergence of interests between the caliphs and the provincial armies contributed to political instability, while the fiscal imperatives that had stimulated interregional exchange in the Roman period through the state-directed transport of commodities in bulk from tax-producing to tax-receiving provinces were lacking. Regional commercial networks in places such as Syria and Palestine remained intact, and elite consumption perpetuated long-distance trade in luxury goods from northern Europe and central and southeast Asia, but the disappearance of large-scale distributions of Syrian and Palestinian amphorae and north African fine wares is apparent in the eighth century within the Islamic empire no less than elsewhere throughout the Mediterranean. Well before the end of

¹⁶ See now Abd al-Aziz Duri, *Early Islamic Institutions: Administration and Taxation from the Caliphate to the Umayyads and Abbasids* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011).

the century, a new (and archaeologically less visible) basis of interregional exchange between Christian Europe and the Caliphate was in place, in the form of the mass export to the Muslim world of European slaves captured as fruits of Frankish conquests.¹⁷

The overthrow of the Umayyads by the army of Khurasan (a province in present-day northeastern Iran, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan) and the installation of the Abbasids as a caliphal dynasty in the new city of Baghdad eclipsed Syria and its army and signaled growing political and cultural alignment between Arabs and Persians. Centralization of the military accompanied a consolidation of the fiscal system and its bureaucracy in Iraq; the resulting redirection and concentration of taxes at the center contributed to the flourishing of the Islamic golden age but also encouraged fragmentation during periods of political struggle, as breakaway provinces withheld revenues and recruited their own armies. Tax revolts fueled separatist regimes from the end of the eighth century, and by the 920s the Abbasid caliphate had effectively broken up, notwithstanding the survival of the dynasty itself until the thirteenth century.

The Franks

Following the collapse of Ostrogothic hegemony in the western Mediterranean in the sixth century, and in spite of the efforts of Justinian to reestablish direct imperial control from Constantinople over the west, the geopolitical center of western Europe shifted decisively north of the Alps during the sixth and following centuries. The emergence of a supraregional power under a series of Germanic-speaking Frankish dynasties on both sides of the former Rhine frontier between the Atlantic and the Elbe, in what is now France, the Benelux countries, and western Germany, was an unprecedented phenomenon. Lacking the ability to tax agricultural production systematically in order to maintain large standing armies, and relying instead upon forces supplied by militarized, landowning elites who controlled localities, the Frankish empire was less intrusive and resilient than the Roman: conciliating, mobilizing, and rewarding their supporters obliged its rulers to exercise patronage, fueled by the proceeds from predatory foreign conquests. Correspondingly, their authority waned when opportunities for expansion were lacking.

Childeric, the son of Merovech – the eponymous founder of the Merovingian dynasty, himself reportedly the offspring of a sea monster – appears in

17 Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce A.D. 300–900* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

the middle of the fifth century as the leader of a Frankish subgroup called the Salii cooperating with Gallo-Romans in resisting incursions of Visigoths and others along the Loire Valley. Upon his death in c. 481, he ruled a principality in the former Roman province of Belgica Inferior. His son and successor, Clovis (r. 481–511), consolidated rival Frankish subgroups into a strong monarchy that had captured most of southwestern Gaul from the Visigoths, subjected the Burgundians, and conquered the Alamanni on the eastern bank of the Rhine. By the time of his death, his kingdom had become, together with that of the Ostrogoths, one of the most formidable post-Roman successor states in the west. In contrast with the heterodoxy of other barbarian rulers, which may be explained in part as a tactic of political and cultural resistance to the Roman imperial order, Clovis' conversion to orthodox Christianity contributed to receptiveness on the part of the Byzantines to the Franks as potential allies. Yet they adroitly exploited openings presented by Theoderic's death in 526 and consulted their own interests in the wake of Justinian's intervention in Italy. Clovis' grandson Theudebert (r. 533–548) usurped an imperial prerogative by issuing his own gold coinage.

Merovingian expansion reached its fullest extent late in the sixth century. By the second half of the seventh century, power had devolved upon regional elites in Neustria, Austrasia, and Burgundy, and peripheral areas had re-asserted their independence. Resurgence occurred under the Carolingians at the end of the century. The first prominent member of the dynasty, Pippin (d. 714), achieved dominance as Mayor of the Palace (*maior palatii*, chief officer of the royal household) in both Austrasia and Neustria in northern Francia after 687. His son Charles Martel (d. 741) re-established control in Burgundy and conquered Aquitaine. His son, another Pippin, deposed the last Merovingian, Childeric III, and was crowned king in 752 (d. 768). Imperial expansion accelerated and reached its height under his son Charles "the Great" (*Karolus magnus*), better known as Charlemagne (r. 768–814), whose conquests included Saxony, the Lombard kingdom, and the central European empire of the Avars. Under his direct rule thus fell Gaul, parts of northern Spain, the territory between the Rhine and the Elbe, northern Italy, and much of the middle Danube region.

By the later ninth century, Carolingian power was effectively confined to a limited block of territory around Paris. Elsewhere in west Francia, power had devolved upon a constellation of local princes. In east Francia beyond the Rhine, however, one of Charlemagne's grandsons, Louis the German (r. 817–876), enjoyed a long reign and created conditions that enabled the kingdom to

survive the extinction of his line, in 911, evolving into the Ottonian dynasty in the tenth century.

South of the Loire, sixth-century successors of old Roman elites preserved their holdings and retained a recognizably urban culture. Cities, governed by local notables, remained in place, and evidence of Frankish settlement is limited. North of the Loire, in contrast, cities recede from view as places of elite consumption and display, and disruptions in patterns of aristocratic landholding and episcopal succession are apparent, consistent with the ruralization of Frankish elites from the seventh century onwards. Evidence of so-called bipartite manors, the characteristic great estates of the Carolingian period, begins to appear between the Loire and the Rhine, under which the demesne land directly exploited by the landlord is developed and maintained through services imposed on the manses. The mansus was a unit of assessment, comprising a complete farm with its dwelling, outbuildings, fields and meadows, and inhabitants, in which the tenant was secure in his possession and could transmit his tenure to his children, in exchange for which he was liable for customary payments and services.

Frankish kings preferred to live in rural palaces in the heartlands of their kingdom where their own lands and followers were concentrated. Power was displayed not in the city, much less in a permanent capital, in contrast with the Lombard and Visigothic kings who held court and maintained a permanent administration at Pavia and Toledo, respectively. It was instead at the annual spring assembly that military and ecclesiastical elites gathered to confirm bonds of fidelity, to exchange gifts and tribute, and to assemble forces for military campaigns. The great landowners, lay and clerical, resided in palaces in rural estates, in abbeys founded in the countryside, or in villa-based rural settlements surviving from the late Roman period.

Concentrations of elite wealth account for the comparative vitality of northern European exchange in the period, in contrast to the drying up of channels for the importation of olive oil and other Mediterranean products into northwestern Gaul from southern ports such as Fos, Toulon, Narbonne, and Marseilles at the end of the seventh century. The need to transport goods from peripheral estates to the central residences of their proprietors likely stimulated exchange on a regional and even international level and sustained demand for relatively rare prestige goods on the part of agrarian elites in northern Francia and their counterparts in England and Scandinavia. The development of the bipartite manor seems to reflect increasing demand and the intensification of the exploitation of peasant producers. Distributions of high-quality ceramics along the great river valleys between the Loire and the

Rhine offer evidence of commercial production networks and internal exchange.

Exchange to and from the Frankish lands underpinned the prosperity of trading centers in the North Sea region, so-called emporia or "wics," which prospered at the height of Carolingian prosperity and stability between the de facto rule of Charles Martel and the reign of Charlemagne's son and successor Louis the Pious (r. 814–840). River estuaries became points of entry for travelers from Ireland, Britain, and Scandinavia, including diplomats, merchants, missionaries, and pilgrims. The emporia situated there were centers of international trade. Kings collected customs dues, and workshops and agricultural markets developed in their vicinities. They included Quentovic in Neustria, close to the English Channel, and Dorestad, on the border between Austrasia and Frisia on the former course of the Rhine; in England, Lundenwic, near the site of Roman London, Hamwic, on the site of the future Southampton, and Ipswich in East Anglia; other sites, such as Dublin, Birka in Sweden, Hedeby on the Jutland peninsula, and Kiev, attest to the trading activities of Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes.

Other points of reference

Elsewhere in western Europe the localization and simplification of production and exchange following the cessation of imports from north Africa and the east in the seventh century varied considerably from place to place. Southern France offers evidence of continuity of occupation and examples of large-scale landowning, but few signs of new construction until the ninth century. In Italy the Lombard aristocracy was based in cities, and urban activity is apparent in the eighth century in Milan, Verona, Pisa, Venice, and elsewhere. Already in the early ninth century, Venice begins to emerge as a point of entry for eastern Mediterranean goods destined for the Franks.

Rome remained by far the largest city in the west, with a population of perhaps 25,000 in the eighth century. Church-building and artisanal production continued throughout the period to a greater degree than elsewhere, stimulated by internal demand and ongoing diplomatic links with Byzantium, which supported cultural interaction and perhaps some level of exchange there and with other cities in Byzantine Italy, such as Naples. The glazed fine ware known as Forum Ware that was locally produced in Rome in the eighth century and evidently inspired by Constantinopolitan forms and techniques enjoyed a long period of development and a wide influence, being

exported and imitated along the Tuscan coast and in southern France well into the ninth century.¹⁸

In Spain the destruction of the Visigothic kingdom by the Umayyads in 711 intensified a tendency toward localization already apparent in the sixth and seventh centuries, notably in inland areas that were already isolated from the Mediterranean exchange system, and precipitated a wholesale collapse of economic and settlement patterns in the most radically destabilized areas. Elsewhere local artisanal production of utilitarian ceramics continued, while finer wares are found in the southern cities in which the Umayyads initially established themselves on the peninsula, notably Mérida, Córdoba, and Montefrío near Granada. By the end of the eighth century, the unification of al-Andalus under the Umayyad emirate, centered in Córdoba, signaled progress toward stabilization and economic recovery, as represented by new construction and the development of Islamic-influenced glazed fine wares in the later ninth century.

Conquest, conversion, acculturation

The ninth century presents itself as an opportunity for taking stock at or along several points of relative equilibrium. Given the limited space available, it is impossible to do justice to the development of every area on the periphery of the great European powers of the period. What follows is an attempt at a panoramic snapshot around 900 CE that takes in post-Roman Britain, Scandinavia, and the Slavs.

Post-Roman Britain

The Roman occupation of Britain ensured the prosperity of a relatively small class of villa owners, who exploited the English countryside more intensively than at any point prior to the high middle ages. About 407 CE an imperial usurper stationed in Britain proclaimed himself Constantine III (d. 411) and crossed over into Gaul in an effort to stabilize the Rhine frontier, following which effective imperial control over the island was never reestablished.

Absent a security presence to the north and on both sides of the Channel, the Romano-British were exposed to raiding by Picts and Scots and by Anglo-Saxons from the mainland. In the middle of the fifth century, they reportedly

¹⁸ Neil J. Christie, "Forum Ware, the Duchy of Rome, and Incastellamento: Problems in Interpretation," *Archeologia Medievale* 24 (1987): 451–66.

appealed in vain for imperial support in suppressing the assaults of Saxons, apparently recruited as mercenaries, who had subsequently staged a revolt. A counteroffensive organized by a certain Aurelius Ambrosius (the prototype of King Arthur), crowned by a British victory at the unidentified Badon Hill, seems to have stabilized the situation down to the mid-sixth century, preserving for the time being an exiguous but culturally and linguistically post-Roman elite. By the beginning of the seventh century, in any event, ten or more relatively small Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had been established in England, probably as a result of an extended, if relatively small-scale, flow of population from the continent.

The consequences of these changes are apparent in the countryside. While late Roman Britain was organized into a number of villa-centered estates, these had been broken up into smaller units of production by c. 600, as a result of which concentrations of wealth were reduced and former Roman towns lost much of their urban character. Whether this development preceded the Saxon incursions in the context of the imperial withdrawal from the province, or was instead the result of those incursions, is an unsettled question. It may be that the need to reward a larger number of followers than the Romano-British model of landholding could support persuaded Anglo-Saxon kings against maintaining and reproducing the old order, even if it were still extant.

Scandinavia

In the Roman period, trade in amber led from the southern shores of the Baltic to central Europe and the Black Sea. Some Jutland populations had been involved in the Anglo-Saxon takeover of Roman Britain. Yet trading and raiding in the later eighth and the early ninth centuries brought larger numbers of Scandinavians into closer contact with populations in both western Europe and European Russia than ever before.

Following the collapse of the western empire and the disruption of established interregional exchange networks between the Mediterranean and northern Gaul by the seventh century, the establishment of emporia along the English Channel and the North Sea coasts offered powerful incentives for Scandinavians to develop ocean-going naval technology and stimulated the expansion of the northern European exchange network into the Baltic region. Political instability in the aftermath of the collapse of the powerful Danish monarchy that had established itself by c. 700 in southern Jutland and some of the adjacent islands plausibly accounts for the migration of armed bands out of Scandinavia in the mid-ninth century and their

settlement on the western islands, in northern France, and in northern Russia.¹⁹

Viking raiding from Norway into northern Britain and Ireland and as far as Portland in the south, and again from Denmark along both sides and south of the English Channel, is well attested from the end of the eighth century. The island systems of Shetland, Orkney, and the Hebrides were colonized on a large scale by the middle of the ninth century, while the settlement of Iceland was well under way by the end of the century. During these decades monasteries within Ireland, which represented the largest concentrations of wealth and people anywhere on the island, were subject to attack both on the coasts and in the interior, as raiders ventured upriver. As attacks on either side of the Channel intensified – Paris was looted in 845 – Viking groups began to overwinter in western Europe, and individuals identified as kings appear in the sources for the first time.

In the 860s Viking forces conquered the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of East Anglia, Northumbria, and Mercia in England until their progress was halted by the victory of King Alfred of Wessex (r. 871–899) at the Battle of Edington in 878, following which the Danish king Guthrum (d. c. 890) accepted baptism, Mercia was divided, and the Scandinavian presence in England recognized as the Danelaw. Frankish instability following the division of the empire among Charlemagne's grandsons offered fresh opportunities on the continent, and effective resistance was achieved only in 891 when a large Danish army was defeated at the River Dyle in Belgium. In England, Alfred withstood renewed Danish incursions in the 890s. The Irish kings united against the remaining Viking enclaves on the island, reducing their major stronghold, Dublin, in 902. Forces expelled from the British Isles turned upon western Francia, where Carolingian authority continued to recede. In 911, notably, land in and around Rouen was granted to a Viking leader named Rollo (d. c. 932), out of which would eventually evolve the Duchy of Normandy. Comparable settlements in the first quarter of the tenth century in England, Ireland, and northern France, including the resettlement of Vikings in Dublin, tied down most of the raiders.

Scandinavians also played a critical role in the emergence of the first Russian state. The name “Rus” is plausibly derived from the Finnish name for Swedes. Archaeological evidence suggests that in the mid-eighth century Scandinavian adventurers were moving south and east of the Baltic into

¹⁹ On sources and context, see Dagfinn Skre, “Towns and Markets, Kings and Central Places in South-Western Scandinavia, c. AD 800–950,” in Dagfinn Skre (ed.), *Kaupang in Skiringssal* (Aarhus University Press, 2007), vol. I, pp. 445–69.

European Russia. There they began establishing a trade in slaves and furs, as well as amber, honey, and wax, which they are documented conducting with both Muslims and Byzantines in the tenth century. Plausibly they interacted with the local Finn, Balt, and Slav populations – engaging in commerce or exacting tribute, as the case might be – in order to obtain trade goods which they were equipped to transport to distant markets.

Dendrochronology establishes that in 737 Scandinavians established a small colony on the River Volkhov close to Lake Ladoga. The initial market was Frankish elites in the west, but opportunities afforded by rivers in European Russia draining south into the Black and Caspian seas were soon realized. Muslim silver coin hoards were beginning to be deposited along the Volga from c. 800, by which point the Abbasid capital at Baghdad was the center of the Islamic empire. In 839 a delegation of Scandinavians from Russia reached the Carolingian court, having been sent along from Constantinople. Following a period of turmoil in the second half of the ninth century, during which another Scandinavian power base was emerging on the middle Dnieper at Kiev, a Scandinavian attack c. 860 from Russia on Constantinople is recorded, and the scale of Viking raids in the West was intensifying; the situation, however, seems to have stabilized by the turn of the century.

At this point there were apparently three key Scandinavian settlements in eastern Europe: one on the Volkhov in the north, commanding access to the Baltic Sea and routes west; another along the upper Volga, affording access to the Caspian Sea and the Islamic world; and the third at Kiev on the middle Dnieper, affording access to the Black Sea and Constantinople. Through these exchange networks linking areas rich in raw materials with centers of consumption in west and east, Scandinavians established themselves in Russia as a new elite, out of which the first Russian polity, Kievan Rus, would form, reportedly under the leadership of a certain Oleg of Novgorod, at the end of our period.

The Slavs

The collapse of the northern Roman frontier in the fifth and the sixth centuries reordered relationships not only within the empire but also along its periphery. The relocation of armed and organized, predominantly Germanic-speaking elites on former Roman territory in the west and on the lands between the Rhine and the Elbe created an opening for groups of Slavic speakers, previously unknown in Greco-Roman ethnographic writing, to engage in raiding across the Danube from c. 500 C.E. By 550 they emerge as

the main barbarian group confronting the eastern Roman empire in south-eastern Europe. By 900, they dominated large parts of Europe east of the Elbe as well as the Bohemian basin, much of the Balkan peninsula, and elsewhere.

Evidence of the simplification of material culture by c. 700 across the former frontier east of the Elbe and north of the Danube is consistent with the hypothesis that, following the relocation of militarized elites, a numerous peasantry remained settled on the landscape. Literary testimony places Slavic-speaking Scлавenes and Antae north of the lower Danube frontier, in modern Wallachia and southern Moldavia, at the beginning of the sixth century. The absence of Slavs in accounts of prior events on this frontier, and in particular the lack of ascription of this identity to any of the groups swept up into Attila's empire, which occupied the same area in the middle of the fifth century, requires explanation.

Given the lack of conclusive linguistic or archaeological evidence pointing to a place of origin from which the Slavs suddenly migrated in the sixth century, it is plausible to suppose that Slavic identity emerges *in situ*, not as a result of ethnic self-description on the part of people who appear north of the Danube for the first time, but rather as an act of ethnographic definition imposed on indigenous groups beyond the frontier by imperial authorities and Byzantine authors in response to the altered security situation there.²⁰ The advent of the Avars, a Turkic-speaking group of nomadic horsemen who by 570 CE had established themselves on the Great Hungarian Plain, exacerbated these conditions by recapitulating the confluence of circumstances that had given rise to Attila's empire, prompting the Lombards to cross the Alps into northern Italy, where they established a kingdom at the expense of the Byzantines. Like the Huns, the Avars seem to have operated an unequal confederation holding a range of initially unwilling subjects in allegiance. War with the Persians in the 580s and again in the 610s obliged the Byzantines to concentrate their forces in the east, leaving the European provinces exposed to attacks by Avars and Slavs. By 614 the Danube frontier had collapsed, opening the way for Slavic settlement throughout the Balkans. Constantinople itself was besieged in 626.

The relationship between these developments and the diffusion of Slavic settlement into north-central Europe and western Russia by the end of our period remains unclear. Slavization is plausibly explained as a process of cultural emulation, whereby a way of life spreads across large areas as a result

20 Florin Curta, *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, c. 500–700* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

of its adoption in progressive stages by a substantial indigenous population. Descriptions of early Slavic society in Byzantine sources stress its poverty, simplicity, and relatively egalitarian nature and suggest that at least some early Slavic groups were remarkable for their willingness to assimilate outsiders. Interaction with Roman authorities and with the Avar empire suggests that some degree of military organization and effectiveness was available, while the scale of cultural and linguistic change implies that the process was not free from conflict. The reach of the Slavic language itself may be explained as the dissemination of a *lingua franca* throughout the areas of Avar domination.

The destruction of the Avar empire by Charlemagne just before 800 precipitated the eventual emergence of successor states in central Europe. Areas that had earlier been among the least developed in western Eurasia come into focus, and an embryonic idea of Europe as a coherent, culturally interconnected network of polities begins to take shape. In the mid-ninth century, "Great" Moravia became the first Slavic state to convert to Christianity, resisting Frankish encroachment by receiving in the 860s the Byzantine missionaries Cyril and Methodius, who produced the first written form of a Slavic language in order to translate the Bible. As Carolingian power waned in the early 890s, the Moravians extended their hegemony over Bohemia, but their ambitions were curbed by the arrival of the nomadic Magyars in 896 as a major force in central Europe (see Map 14.2).

Key aspects of the period

The disruption of the late Roman exchange network linking the prosperous, revenue-producing areas of the Mediterranean heartland with militarized frontier zones in the north and east during the fifth century in the west and during the seventh century in the east resulted, to varying degrees, in the localization and simplification of economic production and trade in comparison with preceding periods. To the extent that post-Roman successor states lost the power to tax, the basis of military recruitment and organization was altered and the relationship between central authority and local elites transformed. In many areas late Roman patterns of landholding and elements of the urban network were preserved and adapted, but the fundamentally civilian character of the Roman aristocratic ethos, which had been preserved and diffused through the dissemination of Greco-Roman literary and rhetorical education and served as a badge of elite identity and the prerequisite for an official career, lost its *raison d'être*. The militarization of lay elites in the



Map 14.2 Europe and the Mediterranean in the tenth century

post-Roman west was a consequence of these developments, while Byzantium and the Caliphate experienced different outcomes. The Byzantines, pressured by external threats, preserved a civilian administration focused upon the imperial court in Constantinople while resisting the centrifugal influences of increasingly dominant military elites settled in the provinces. The Caliphate experienced somewhat comparable tensions between the center and the periphery, which were conditioned, however, by the contingent circumstances of the Arab conquests and the consequent influences of subject populations upon the empire.

Charlemagne's imperial coronation represented not only the appropriation of a specifically Roman imperial legacy, especially as this had been received and transmitted by the Byzantines, but also a claim to universal supremacy implicit in the idea, which animated each of the great powers in the period, of the monarch as the personally chosen representative of God on earth. Within Europe, correspondingly, conversion to Christianity served variously as a strategy not only of assimilation and accommodation with but also of resistance to, and differentiation from, a hegemonic power. The institutional integrity of the ecclesiastical hierarchy offered alternative paths to advancement in both east and west, while in the latter the generally higher level of literacy on the part of clerics relative to lay elites made them valuable to monarchs as more complex and bureaucratic forms of organization developed.

Around 837 CE the iconoclast emperor Theophilus (r. 829–842) reportedly built a palace on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus at Bryas that was inspired by contemporary Abbasid palaces, as described by an envoy returning from an embassy to Baghdad, at a point at which such structures are notable for their apparent Sasanian influences. The caliph with whom the emperor communicated, al-Ma'mun (r. 813–833), was the founder of the great Abbasid library, the Bayt al-Hikma, and encouraged the translation into Arabic of the philosophical and scientific works of classical Greek authors such as Aristotle. Such exchanges did not prevent the two powers from warring with one another and are probably to be understood as acts of cultural appropriation, motivated not only by contemporary political and military rivalries but also by an appreciation of the legitimizing power of the past, be it that of imperial Persia or the early Greek enlightenment. In this respect perhaps these efforts can be compared with Charlemagne's imperial coronation in 800. If such accomplishments are broadly illustrative of (the end of) late antiquity, the period is remarkable because so much remained to be settled, and correspondingly so much was ripe for appropriation.

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East Asia

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At first glance, the year 1200 BCE seems to fall awkwardly in the middle of what is traditionally known as the Shang dynasty (c. 1570–1045 BCE), the second of the legendary “Three Dynasties” of classical Chinese antiquity.¹ The date might appear, therefore, to be a rather randomly arbitrary starting point for Chinese – and East Asian – history, except that it also coincides fairly closely with the archaeologically discovered first appearance of writing, and of the first known chariots (or wheeled vehicles of any kind). Despite its lack of significance in the traditionally received chronology, 1200 BCE actually does seem to mark some epochal changes, including the beginning of documented Chinese history.

The chariot was apparently introduced to Shang China around this time from foreign origins in the northwestern steppes. The first evidence of its use for military purposes is associated with the activities of Shang enemies along their western frontier.² Much of the jade that has been unearthed from the ruins of the late Shang capital at Anyang (in what is now north-central China) also originated in what is today the far northwestern province of Xinjiang, which was then still a remote foreign land. Clearly, the Shang dynasty did not exist in solitary isolation. Indeed, the original rise of Bronze Age civilization in northern China may have owed something to the region’s position as a crossroads for trading networks that reached as far as Central Asia and the Indian Ocean.³ Nevertheless, the writing system that the Shang produced is utterly unique, and the inscriptions that have been found from this earliest period are, moreover, already written in an archaic form of the same Chinese language that is still spoken today.

1 The Three Dynasties were Xia (c. 2070–1570 BCE), Shang, and Zhou (c. 1045–256 BCE).

2 Edward L. Shaughnessy, “Historical Perspectives on the Introduction of the Chariot into China,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 48 (1988): 189–90, 192, and 221.

3 Andrew J. Abalakin, “‘Sino-Pacific’: Conceptualizing Greater Southeast Asia as a Sub-Arena of World History,” *Journal of World History* 22 (2011): 678.

The continuous use of this Chinese language (with a few changes over time, especially in the earliest and most recent periods) may be the single most important element of continuity in the 3,000 years of recorded Chinese history. In addition, the written Chinese language also played a critical role in shaping the emergence of a distinctively East Asian cultural zone. This is because the earliest writing in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam all employed the Chinese script – which, because it is not primarily a phonetic writing system, carried with it entire words and ideas. Not infrequently, also, the early Japanese, Koreans, and Vietnamese even used the Chinese written language itself.

Writing was first introduced to the Japanese islands through inscriptions on material objects that were imported from the continent starting in the last century BCE. In Japan, literacy long thereafter remained an immigrant specialty. By perhaps as early as the fifth or sixth century CE, however, people on the islands had begun experimenting with ways of (awkwardly) using Chinese characters to transcribe the sounds of the spoken Japanese language – a language that is completely unrelated to Chinese. Through standardization and simplification of the characters that were used to write phonetically in this way, by the ninth century CE two different sets of phonetic symbols had been devised (collectively known as *kana*), representing all the syllables of the spoken Japanese language. After that, it was possible to write Japanese easily without any further need for Chinese characters. Nonetheless, Chinese characters still continued to be commonly used for their meaning rather than for their phonetic value, and, in practice, the Chinese script has continued to be used in Japan (in conjunction with *kana*) even to the present day.

The Koreans, who had preceded the Japanese in literacy, also soon began developing ways of adapting Chinese characters to write their own native language, although extremely little survives in Korean from before the invention of the Korean alphabet (known as *hangŭl*) in the fifteenth century CE. The Vietnamese, too, developed new Chinese-style characters to express uniquely Vietnamese ideas. Despite these departures and innovations, however, Chinese characters remained the dominant means of writing throughout East Asia until the late nineteenth century. Even today, not unlike the extensive legacy of Greek- and Latin-derived words in European languages, many modern Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese vocabulary items still stem from Chinese. As a highly conspicuous symbol of East Asian cultural distinctiveness, the East Asian writing systems are said to be the only scripts in regular use anywhere in the world today that cannot be traced ultimately to

the ancient Near East.⁴ The development of writing in Bronze Age China is thus fundamental to both Chinese and East Asian civilization more broadly.

The Shang and Zhou eras

Although tantalizing examples of markings that seem to resemble writing have been discovered from earlier periods, the first unmistakable examples of written language in China appear on the “oracle bones” that were used for divination at the late Shang court. During divination, intense heat was applied to points on tortoise shells or animal bones in such a way as to cause them to crack, and the shape of the cracks was interpreted as answers from the spirit world to questions posed by a diviner (who was frequently the king) (see Fig. 15.1). After about 1200 BCE, these questions, and occasionally also the spirit’s alleged answers, began to sometimes be inscribed upon the bones as a permanent written record. Amazingly, the very existence of these oracle bone inscriptions had been forgotten in China until the late nineteenth century, when antique dealers began marketing them as ingredients for medicines. Eventually, curious scholars traced the source of these bones to the vicinity of the modern city of Anyang, and between 1929 and 1937 the site was scientifically excavated by archaeologists.

What the archaeologists found at Anyang, as verified by the oracle bone inscriptions, were the ruins of the last Shang capital, which appears to have become a major city from about 1200 BCE. This exciting discovery spectacularly confirmed at least part of the traditional Chinese historical narrative, but subsequent archaeological investigations outside the core Shang area (modern northeastern Henan and western Shandong provinces) did not find evidence of any large, centralized, and unified Shang state, as traditionally expected. Instead, there appear to have been several distinctive regional Bronze Age civilizations in the area that we now call “China.” The culture to the south of Shang, in the middle and lower Yangzi River valley region, for example, was characterized by large bronze bells that were struck with the mouth pointed upwards. In the upper Yangzi River basin, in modern Sichuan, archaeologists in 1986 discovered a wholly unexpected cache of unusual bronzes, notably including some remarkable large human figures, at a place called Sanxingdui. In other words, the traditional image of a solitary and uniform Shang dynasty “China” has been challenged somewhat by recent archaeology.

⁴ William G. Boltz, “Language and Writing,” in Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 BC* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 123.



Figure 15.1 Taipei, Taiwan: Inscribed Turtle Plastron – Oracle Bone – National Museum.
Ancient Chinese Writing Symbols Bone-shell Writing (Art Directors & TRIP / Alamy)

The best current interpretation of the archaeological evidence is that around 1500 BCE a large state, characterized by the production of bronze ritual vessels, did emerge out of earlier foundations on north China's Central Plain and expand outward to create a huge empire (in the descriptive sense of the word, since the Chinese title "emperor" did not exist yet). Following the traditional chronology, some scholars are inclined to view this as an early phase of the Shang dynasty. Because there were no written records, however, we do not actually know what this state called itself, and archaeologists commonly refer to it by the name of an early type-site, Erligang. Erligang domination over this vast territory appears to have then stimulated the rapid development of local secondary civilizations in the outlying regions, and after about 1300 BCE the Erligang empire collapsed back onto its core, resulting in the multicultural world of the late Shang era familiar from the oracle bone inscriptions.⁵

Of particular interest, one of the late Shang neighbors was a people called the Zhou. Both archaeology and tradition suggest that the Zhou people had moved around, and possibly even lived a semi-nomadic existence for some time, before finally settling in the Wei River valley in the west of modern Shaanxi province (the region "within the passes"), perhaps around the twelfth century BCE. This area was exposed to contacts both with northern non-Chinese cultures, the distinctive southern civilizations of the Yangzi valley, and with the Shang kingdom to its east. From Shang, the Zhou derived bronze ritual vessel styles, the practice of oracle bone divination, and the written language. Zhou leaders initially accepted subordination to the Shang king as vassal dukes, but they soon claimed the supreme Shang title of "king" for themselves, coming into conflict with the Shang.

Around 1045 BCE, the second Zhou king, King Wu ("the Martial"), mobilized a large coalition and conquered the Shang. It is possible that large-scale use of war chariots, which at that time was still something of a novelty in China, may have contributed to the Zhou victory; 300 chariots were said to have led the Zhou army into the climactic battle. In Chinese tradition, however, the conquest is invariably portrayed as the moral triumph of virtue over depravity. Soon after the decisive battle, the Zhou king ritually announced his intention to assume rule over the "Central Country" (*Zhongguo*, or Middle Kingdom). From the oracle bone inscriptions, we know that the Shang had previously conceived of their state as "Central

5 Robert Bagley, "Shang Archaeology," in Loewe and Shaughnessy (eds.), *Cambridge History of Ancient China*, pp. 124 and 156–58.

Shang,” surrounded by the outlying “four regions.” After the Zhou conquest, the new state was obviously no longer “Central Shang,” and the more generic label “Central Country” was applied. This term eventually became a standard Chinese-language name for China. Unlike Zhou or Shang (and the names of other subsequent dynasties), though, this was originally less a proper name than simply a geographic description.

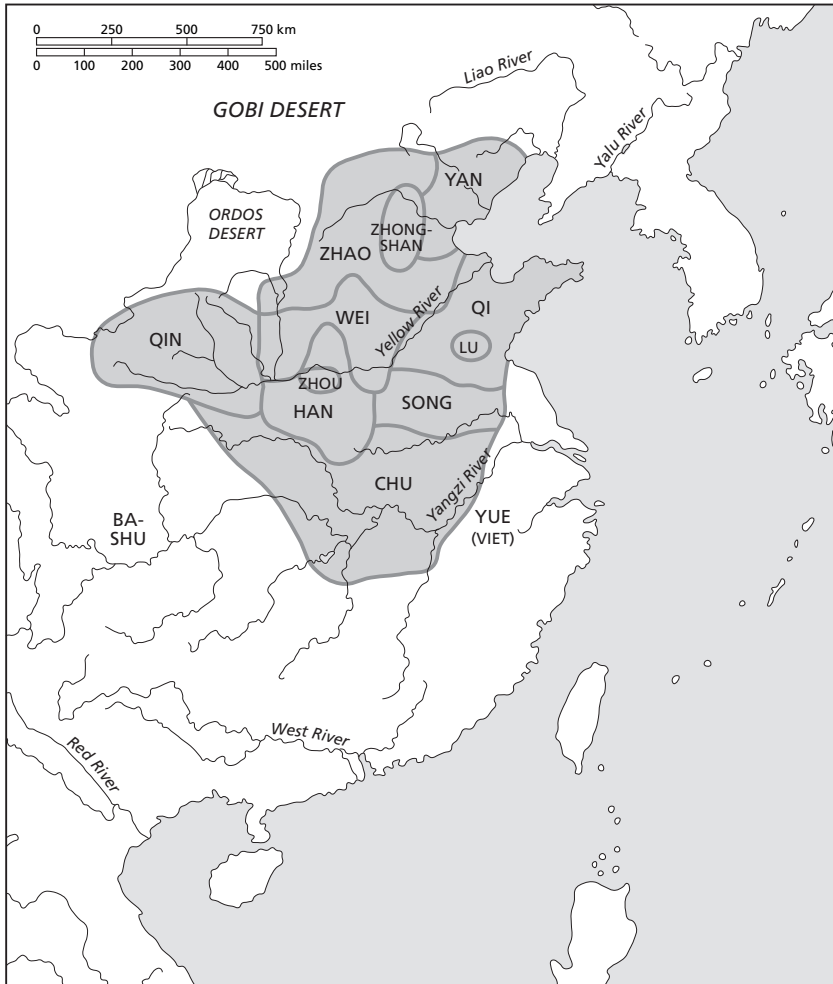
This Zhou conquest was foundational. The Zhou dynasty that was established by this conquest survived for some eight centuries, the longest of any in Chinese history, and the early Zhou became an idealized model that was deeply revered throughout East Asia until modern times. Zhou was the age of Confucius, and it saw the appearance of nearly all of the classic Chinese schools of thought and works of literature. Zhou also established the characteristically Chinese idea that a supreme deity known as “Heaven” (*Tian*) bestows its “Mandate of Heaven” (*Tianming*) upon a worthy monarch, as “Son of Heaven” (*Tianzi*), to legitimately rule all “Under Heaven” (*Tianxia*), while withdrawing it from previous ruling houses that had lost their virtue (like the decadent last Shang king).

This key political concept validated (as reallocations of the Mandate of Heaven) all of the many changes of dynasty that occurred throughout premodern Chinese history, while also, perhaps, simultaneously encouraging a belief that at any given time there could be only one legitimate dynasty “Under Heaven,” and contributing to an exceptionally strong Chinese ideal of political unity. Curiously enough, however, this Chinese concept of a Heavenly Mandate exhibits close similarities to the steppe nomadic idea of a universal sky god, *Tängri*, and the beliefs of non-East Asian cultures to China’s north and west.⁶ Elsewhere in East Asia, on the other hand, imperial legitimacy in Japan was derived from a claim to divine descent from the Sun Goddess, while the Korean king’s Chinese-style Mandate of Heaven was invested upon him as an autonomous vassal, or “tributary,” of the Chinese Son of Heaven.⁷

Though claiming ultimate sovereignty over all “Under Heaven,” the Zhou realm was never a strongly centralized state. Instead, Zhou kings delegated authority to local vassals, who ruled over what were initially hundreds of small semi-autonomous territories. These, in turn, were staffed by aristocratic officials sustained by their own hereditary estates. In 771 BCE, the Zhou

6 Sanping Chen, *Multicultural China in the Early Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), pp. 119–56.

7 For Korea, see Michael J. Seth, *A Concise History of Korea: From the Neolithic Period through the Nineteenth Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), p. 182.



Map 15.1 East Asia in 350 BCE

capital was sacked by foreigners, and the Zhou kings relocated their seat eastward to Luoyang, in modern Henan province. After this, the real power of the Zhou ruling house declined even further. The territories of the regional nobility became increasingly independent, and eventually, during the Warring States era (475–221 BCE), they became fully sovereign kingdoms in their own right (see Map 15.1). Successful regimes expanded their borders, and the number of states was consolidated, until finally there were only seven. Warfare evolved from a courteous pastime for chariot-riding

aristocrats into mass confrontations between conscript armies of peasant infantrymen wielding deadly crossbows, sometimes numbering in the hundreds of thousands. The stage was set for China's first imperial unification.

In the meantime, as of late Zhou, East Asia beyond the northern Chinese heartland still lay shrouded in pre-history. The various peoples living beyond the frontiers of the Zhou realm remained preliterate, and their story can now be recovered only through archaeology, or from legends that were recorded later. In the vicinity of the Korean Peninsula, the year 1200 BCE also corresponds roughly with some significant developments, including the appearance of a new style of plain pottery and the full maturation (though their origins may be considerably older) of dry-field rice cultivation, bronze metallurgy, and the construction of imposing stone dolmens. Thousands of these megalithic dolmens, often (but not always) marking grave sites, have been found on the Korean Peninsula, and extending from there into Manchuria, the northern Shandong Peninsula in China, and western Japan. This should not be surprising, because the boundaries of a Korean state – indeed, the very idea of “Korea” – had not been defined yet, and peoples related to those who later became Koreans lived scattered over a wide area. Manchuria is just across the Yalu River from Korea, Shandong might seem remote but is actually only 120 miles by sea from the nearest point on the Korean Peninsula, and, on a clear day, the Japanese island of Tsushima can be seen from the Korean shore.

At the same time, none of the bronze ritual vessels that are so characteristic of Shang and Zhou dynasty China have been found in the Korean Peninsula, and a distinctive type of bronze dagger known as the Liaoning dagger has been extensively uncovered in Korea and southern Manchuria, but not in China south of the Great Wall. Clearly, the ancient cultures of Korea were distinct from those of what became China. Vague legend sketches a shadowy kingdom in the area in antiquity called Old Chosŏn, but archaeological evidence does not support the suggestion that there were organized states above the level of small village communities. Korea's rugged mountainous terrain was not encouraging to the early formation of large states.

By the end of the Zhou era, people crossing the water from the Korean Peninsula were beginning to transform life in the Japanese islands. Those islands had long remained only sparsely inhabited by largely pre-agricultural, seafood-consuming villagers, until new arrivals apparently began coming from the Korean Peninsula around 400 BCE. This wave of migration initiated what is known as the Yayoi period (third century BCE – third century CE), when wet-field rice cultivation and the use of both iron

and bronze were introduced to Japan.⁸ The Yayoi period witnessed rapid development in Japan, although until the end of the Yayoi there probably was no political organization above the level of scattered independent local communities.

What is now northern Vietnam also remained preliterate throughout this era, although both bronze and rice cultivation had long since made their appearance. The archaeologically identified Dong Son culture, which flourished in the area around 500–300 BCE, was characterized by the production of superb bronze drums. Later Vietnamese histories claim the region was home to a kingdom they called Văn Lang, which purportedly stretched deep into antiquity and was ancestral to modern Vietnam, but these written descriptions all date from very much later.⁹ The characteristic bronze drums were also not confined to what is today Vietnam, moreover, but were distributed across much of Southeast Asia and remained conspicuous in parts of what is now south China until as late as the seventh century CE.

First empires

If neither Shang nor Zhou had been highly centralized large territorial kingdoms, great strides were made in forging the administrative machinery of statecraft during the Warring States era. Much of this development falls under the rubric of Legalism, an administrative philosophy that included the codification of actual written law. In the northwestern Warring States kingdom of Qin, which was based in the same area “within the passes” as the early Zhou homeland, Legalist techniques were especially perfected. The first systematic tax on agriculture in Qin was reportedly collected in 408 BCE. In 375 BCE, mandatory government registration of all households was imposed, providing a mechanism for universal taxation and conscription for military or labor service, and enabling Qin to effectively mobilize its entire population for government projects. Preexisting rural communities were reorganized into a kingdom-wide network of centrally administered “counties” in 350 BCE, over which larger administrative “commanderies” were later established. A service-oriented bureaucracy of officials appointed based on ability replaced the old hereditary aristocracy.

8 William Wayne Farris, “Ancient Japan’s Korean Connection,” *Korean Studies* 20 (1996): 5–7, 16. Keiji Imamura, *Prehistoric Japan: New Perspectives on Insular East Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1996), pp. 155–60.

9 Keith Weller Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 3–4 and 309–11.



Figure 15.2 Terracotta Army, Qin Dynasty, 210 BCE; warriors (detail) (Tomb of Qin Shi Huangdi, Xianyang, China / Bridgeman Images)

In a series of campaigns conducted between 230–221 BCE, the last Qin king conquered the other six remaining Warring States kingdoms and unified China for the first time into a single centralized state. He capped this magnificent achievement by coining a grandiose new title for himself, *huangdi*, or emperor (more literally, “August Supreme Ruler”). He is best known to history as Qin Shi Huangdi – the “First Emperor of Qin” – and his imperial title and overall imperial system would survive, with some modifications, until 1912 (see Fig. 15.2, the tomb of Qin Shi Huangdi).

Qin not only unified the “Chinese” Warring States, but also extended its imperium well beyond. In 214 BCE, for example, what is now southeast China, which had been largely beyond the pale of Zhou civilization, was brought into the Qin empire by a massive invasion. This new acquisition included much of what is now northern Vietnam. Although northern Vietnam would enjoy periodic autonomy thereafter, it would not achieve permanent independence from the Chinese empire until 939 CE. From about the first century CE until it was outstripped by the rise of Guangzhou (Canton) around the seventh century, moreover, a city on the Red River located not far from present-day Hanoi may have even been China’s busiest southern port.

In the north, Qin conquered and attempted to colonize the Ordos desert region that lies inside the great northward loop of the Yellow River. This had the unintended consequence, however, of stimulating the military organization of the nomadic peoples living in that area into the first great nomadic empire, the Xiongnu, around 209 BCE. Such steppe nomadic empires would thereafter typically provide premodern China's most important foreign adversaries.

During the Neolithic period, the cultures of Inner Mongolia and southern Manchuria had been predominantly agricultural, and not very different from those of northern China, but by the late Shang dynasty these lands already possessed a distinctly different material culture, oriented toward the northwest and away from China. Over the last millennium BCE, then, a horse-riding, livestock-herding, pastoral nomadic lifestyle spread across the region. The gradual northward expansion of the Chinese world, meanwhile, and absorption of intermediary peoples, finally brought the Chinese into direct contact with true nomads around the fourth century BCE, as illustrated by the famous story of the ruler of the Warring States kingdom of Zhao, deciding to adopt nomadic-style cavalry warfare in 307 BCE. China's imperial unification provoked corresponding nomadic organization, and in 200 BCE one Chinese emperor and his army found themselves surrounded and trapped on a mountaintop in northern Shanxi by hostile Xiongnu for a week.

By this time it was no longer the Qin dynasty, however, but the Han. According to tradition, the harshness and inflexibility of the Qin Legalist regime provoked rebellions against it. Within a year of the First Emperor's death in 210 BCE, rebellions had begun. The Qin capital fell in 207 BCE, and, following a brief civil war, a new imperial dynasty, called Han (202 BCE – 220 CE), was established. The Han dynasty combined the rational efficiency of Qin Legalist administration with Confucian moral values, and elicited widespread willing participation in the imperial project from local elites. The dynasty proved to be so successful, and its memory so enduring, that to the present day the Chinese are still called the "Han" people.

For half a century after the Han founder's encirclement by Xiongnu warriors on a mountaintop in 200 BCE, the Han pursued policies of appeasement toward the Xiongnu. When Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BCE) took the throne in 141 BCE, however, he adopted a more aggressive approach. His grand strategy, which was eventually (if expensively) successful, involved outflanking the Xiongnu by expanding the Han Empire far into the northwest, reaching deep into what are now Gansu and Xinjiang provinces. In the

northeast, the Han Empire also expanded into southern Manchuria and northern Korea.

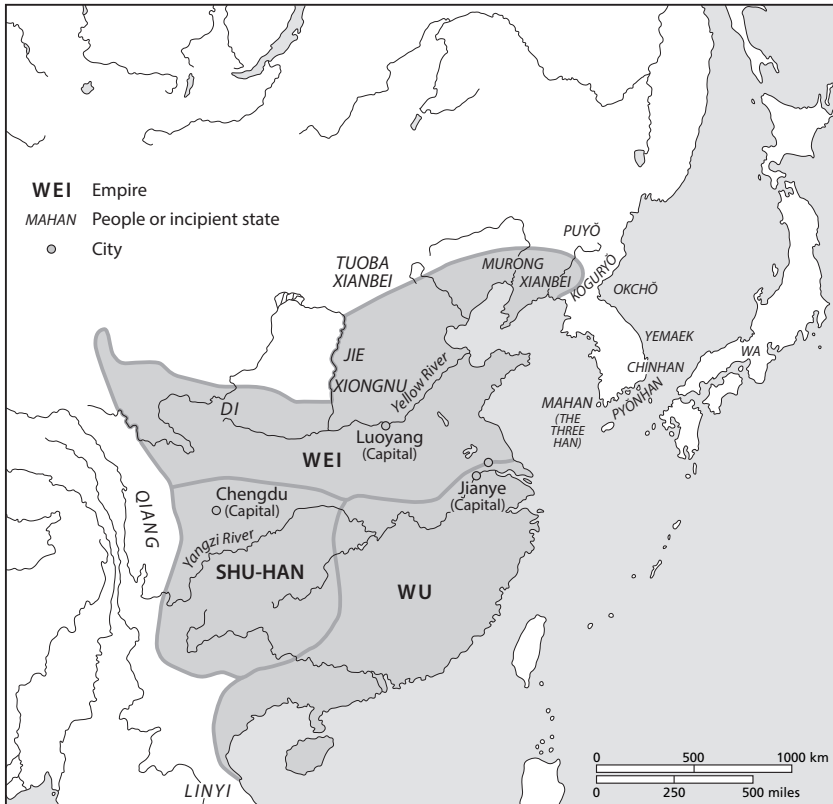
The earliest reliable historical record involving Korea tells the story of a man named Wiman, who had been an official in a minor client kingdom of the Han dynasty called Yan, located in what is now southeastern Manchuria. When the Han founder died in 195 BCE, the king of Yan, uncertain of the new disposition of the Han court, fled to the Xiongnu, while Wiman, with roughly a thousand followers, sought refuge in Korea. Wiman established his own kingdom there, called Chosŏn, with its capital near the site of modern P'yŏngyang. Adopting the hairstyle and clothing of the local natives, he ruled over a mixed population and accepted a subordinate diplomatic relationship with the Han dynasty. In 109 BCE, as part of Emperor Wu's grand strategy of outflanking the Xiongnu, and with the excuse that Wiman's grandson had been preventing the passage of tribute from chieftains in southern Korea to the Han court, a Han invasion was launched. Within a year most of northern Korea had been conquered by the Han.

Four large Han dynasty administrative units, called commanderies, were established in northern Korea. Over time, the number and extent of these commanderies fluctuated. The most significant was Lelang, with its capital located south across the Taedong River from what is now P'yŏngyang. Chinese rule in northern Korea would last 400 years – roughly the same duration as Roman rule in Britain – and is a reminder that the early Chinese empire was not a modern-style nation-state, but a true empire.

In the southern half of the Korean Peninsula, meanwhile, beyond the zone of Chinese administration, loosely organized native communities existed that were collectively known as the “Three Han” (written with a different character from the name of the Chinese Han dynasty). Some linguistic variations reportedly existed between these Three (Korean) Han, and they each consisted of multiple small rural communities. Along the eastern coast of the Korean Peninsula further north, there lived yet other peoples (the Yemaek and Okchŏ), and north of the headwaters of the Yalu River, in southern Manchuria, there was a budding native kingdom called Koguryŏ.

The birth of East Asia

In 184 CE, a religious rebellion called the Yellow Turbans shattered Han dynasty China's imperial unity, although the last Han emperor would not formally abdicate until 220. After 184, multiple warlord armies contended for mastery, with the situation gradually stabilizing into three major rival



Map 15.2 East Asia in 250 CE

regimes, known as the “Three Kingdoms” (220–280), in the third century (see Map 15.2). The regime in the north proved strongest, and by 280 it had conquered the other two (although not until after an internal coup and another change of dynasties), and for a few years after 280 most of China Proper was reunified again. This reunified empire (the Western Jin dynasty) soon tore itself apart amid vicious civil wars, however, and by 316 centralized government in north China had collapsed entirely. Between the third century and the seventh, there would be some thirty-seven dynasties in China.

A surviving prince from this broken empire partially re-established his dynasty (now called the Eastern Jin) in the south after 317, with its capital located at what is today Nanjing (Nanking). This became the first in a succession of five Southern dynasties. (By including the earlier Three

Kingdoms' southern state of Wu, these are sometimes alternatively called the Six Dynasties.) These Southern dynasties were an age of splendid cultural achievement – producing, for example, the man who was arguably the greatest calligraphic genius in all of Chinese history, Wang Xizhi (303–379). A taste for drinking tea also first began to spread in the Southern dynasties, and true paper replaced earlier writing materials, helping to make books more numerous than ever before. One mid-sixth-century southern imperial library, for example, reportedly held 140,000 rolls of documents.¹⁰

At the same time, the agricultural development of south China, which until recently had still been something of a frontier region, surged. The volume of international maritime trade rose, and the southern economy became increasingly commercialized. As an index of economic development, it is likely that the Southern dynasty capital (modern Nanjing) may have been the largest city in the world by the early 500s, with a population of perhaps 1.4 million.¹¹ Spurred by this southern development, after about 500 CE the Chinese economy may have become (and long remained) the largest in the world, even when measured on a per capita basis.¹²

Not all was well, however. Each of the Southern dynasties except for the first was founded by a usurping general, and of questionable legitimacy. There were vast disparities of wealth and poverty, and the southern governments and armies were all weak. In north China, meanwhile, for a couple of centuries after the disintegration of imperial unity in the early 300s commerce slowed to a crawl, fields were abandoned or given over to pasture, and beginning in 304, there was a profusion of non-Chinese military regimes.

The “foreign” intruders consisted of five major non-Chinese population groups, who were collectively known to the Chinese as “Hu.” Most had already been living near, or even inside, the borders of the Chinese empire for some time. All had been, to a greater or lesser extent, exposed to Chinese culture. The most historically important of these peoples were the Xianbei (who were themselves split into several major separately named subgroups). The Xianbei probably originated in the area of southwestern Manchuria. They spoke language(s) that may have been related to later Mongolic,

10 Xiaofei Tian, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star: The Literary Culture of the Liang (502–557)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007), p. 95.

11 Shufen Liu, “Jiankang and the Commercial Empire of the Southern Dynasties: Change and Continuity in Medieval Chinese Economic History,” in Scott Pearce, Audrey Spiro, and Patricia Ebrey (eds.), *Culture and Power in the Reconstitution of the Chinese Realm, 200–600* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 35 and 254.

12 S. A. M. Adshead, *T'ang China: The Rise of the East in World History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 68.

possibly with Turkic infusions. The rise of the Xiongnu nomadic empire during the early Han dynasty had driven the Xianbei further north (to northeastern Inner Mongolia or northern Manchuria), but as the Han dynasty methodically broke the power of the Xiongnu, the Xianbei had drifted back south toward China's borders.

By the fourth century, the introduction of stirrups and armor for both horse and rider enabled northern pastoral tribes to mount particularly powerful heavy cavalry.¹³ Initially, such non-Chinese cavalry were recruited to serve as auxiliaries in China's own civil wars, but following the collapse of Chinese government in the early 300s, warrior leaders emerged as independent forces. Even then, successful warlords often justified their expansion in the name of "saving the [legitimate Chinese] throne." Before long, however, various strongmen began claiming the supreme Chinese title "emperor" for themselves. They often also simultaneously invoked old Xiongnu titles, and Xianbei chieftains introduced another new non-Chinese title that would prove memorable: "khan." Many of these regimes began building the administrative apparatus of a Chinese-style imperial bureaucracy, sometimes including schools to teach the Chinese classic texts.

During the fourth and early fifth centuries, Xianbei bands in the northeast established a series of dynasties in the area of southwestern Manchuria and northeastern China proper. The presence of Xianbei empires in this area had the effect of permanently sundering the Korean Peninsula from Chinese administration. Xianbei dynasties interacted dynamically both with Chinese culture and with the proto-Korean kingdom of Koguryō to their east. Koguryō, for example, may have learned the technique of cavalry warfare from the Xianbei. Koguryō-style cavalry armor then passed down to the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula, and across to the Japanese islands by the fifth century (where mounted archery would eventually become the characteristic combat style of later Japanese samurai).¹⁴

A fascinating example of the hybrid cross-fertilization that was typical of this period is provided by the tomb, located in what is now North Korea, that is attributed by an inscription to Dong (or Tong) Shou (d. 357). This

13 David A. Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare, 300–900* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 41–42.

14 William Wayne Farris, *Sacred Texts and Buried Treasures: Issues in the Historical Archaeology of Ancient Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), pp. 77–78; and Gina L. Barnes, *State Formation in Korea: Historical and Archaeological Perspectives* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), pp. 127 and 141.

man may have been of Chinese descent, and the inscription claims magnificent Chinese titles for him (written in the Chinese language), but he had earlier served a Xianbei dynasty in the northeast. In the wake of a power struggle there, he had fled to Koguryō. His tomb is said by some experts to be in the Koguryō style, and its wall paintings offer excellent illustrations of the armored cavalry and lifestyle of fourth-century northeast Asia. Rather than being either “Chinese” or “Korean” in the modern nationalist sense, this tomb illustrates the cosmopolitan blurring of borders that was characteristic of this age.¹⁵

Chinese titles burnished the prestige of even thoroughly independent local strongmen (or, in the case of at least one third-century Japanese priestess-queen, women). The rulers of emerging Korean kingdoms were commonly invested with prestigious titles by dynasties based in China, and during the fifth century there were no fewer than thirteen recorded missions from Japan to Chinese courts, seeking Chinese titles. By the seventh century, however, Japanese monarchs had stopped accepting subordinate titles from China and, instead, were actively laying claim to rival Chinese-style supreme imperial titles.

Northern Wei

The spread of Chinese cultural influences to Korea and Japan during these centuries was crucial to the formation of what would become a culturally coherent East Asian region (see Map 15.2). At the same time, however, much of China itself had fallen under non-Chinese rule during these years. China, too, was profoundly exposed to foreign influences, especially from the north and west. In the early sixth century, there was reportedly a steady flow of merchants from the remote west arriving in the (Xianbei-ruled) Northern Wei dynasty (386–534) capital at Luoyang, in north-central China (see Fig. 15.3). One Northern Wei prince supposedly possessed horses from as far west as Persia, and there were said to be 10,000 households of foreigners in permanent residence in Luoyang. A silver pitcher found in a grave dated 569 in Ningxia, northwest China, is in the Persian style and is decorated with scenes from the Trojan wars. Another tomb in Shanxi, in north-central

15 See Kenneth H. J. Gardiner, *The Early History of Korea: The Historical Development of the Peninsula up to the Introduction of Buddhism in the Fourth Century AD* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1969), pp. 40–42 and 53–58; and Hyung Il Pai, *Constructing “Korean” Origins: A Critical Review of Archaeology, Historiography, and Racial Myth in Korean State-Formation Theories* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), pp. 196 and 233–34.



Figure 15.3 Mid- to late sixth-century Northern Wei or Northern Qi earthenware camel, China (Metropolitan Museum of Art / © SCALA)

China, dated 592, is decorated with carved stone depictions of such exotic figures as camel-riding hunters who may be Arabs, and Zoroastrian religious iconography.¹⁶

¹⁶ *Memories of Loyang: Yang Hsüan-chih and the Lost Capital (493–534)*, trans. W. J. F. Jenner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 220 and 242; Annette L. Juliano and Judith A. Lerner

Foreign influences on China in this era included such things as the chair, which had been unknown in Chinese antiquity, and a stringed lute-like musical instrument called the *pipa*. The most overwhelming foreign influence undoubtedly was Buddhism. This originally Indian religion had been introduced during the mid-Han dynasty, via the “Silk Roads” trade routes, but it was not until the fourth century that Buddhism really flourished in China. Indian Buddhist scriptures were laboriously translated into Chinese, and a considerable body of original new Chinese compositions was added, forming what became the East Asian Buddhist canon.

To the influence of Gandhāran Buddhist art from what is now northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan – where a fertile fusion of Greek, Persian, and Indian styles had emerged – were added Chinese touches. For example, the construction of Buddhist cave-temples had begun in India, but the world’s largest Buddhist cave-temple statues were erected in Afghanistan (at Bamiyan), and the cave-temple style then spread from Central Asia to northern China. At Yun’gang, near the early Northern Wei capital in northern Shanxi, a spectacular complex of Buddhist statues was carved between 460 and 525. Here, in addition to western influences, Chinese styles and traditional motifs also appear, such as images of dragons and the *taotie* (a mysterious design characteristic of ancient Chinese bronzes). The Xianbei rulers of the Northern Wei dynasty may have felt a special affinity for cave-temples, since they had a pre-Buddhist tradition of locating their ancestral temples in caverns. After they moved their capital further south to Luoyang in 494, they began carving yet another remarkable complex of Buddhist cave-temples at nearby Longmen.

From China, Buddhism was introduced to the Korean Peninsula in the fourth century. The earliest organized native kingdom to develop in the area of Korea had been Koguryō, in the north. Beginning as a group of five tribes inhabiting the mountains north of the headwaters of the Yalu River, Koguryō is mentioned in Chinese sources by as early as 107 BCE, and from 32 CE its rulers had begun claiming the Chinese title “king.” The early Koguryō capital was located, however, on what is now the Chinese side of the Yalu River, in Manchuria, and early Koguryō was as much a Manchurian as a Korean power. It was not until 427 that Koguryō moved its capital south to what is

(eds.), *Monks and Merchants: Silk Road Treasures from Northwest China, Gansu and Ningxia, 4th–7th Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), pp. 98–100; and James C. Y. Watt, Angela F. Howard, An Jiayao, Boris I. Marshak, Su Bai, and Zhao Feng, *China: Dawn of a Golden Age, 200–750 AD* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), pp. 256–57 and 276–83.

now P'yŏngyang and began to be more exclusively oriented toward the peninsula. Koguryŏ's contributions to what eventually became Korea are indisputable, though. For one thing, through an abbreviated version of its name as Koryŏ, it is the source of the English word "Korea."

The rise of native kingdoms in the south of the Korean Peninsula is marked by the appearance of the earliest-known walled cities at the end of the third century, and by large mounded royal tombs, or tumuli, after about 300. It may be no coincidence that this was exactly the time when Chinese imperial administration in northern Korea was disintegrating. Four hundred years of Chinese government there had created a regional "interaction sphere" and initiated a process of secondary state formation that extended not only to Korea but also across to the Japanese islands.¹⁷

The kingdoms of Paekche, in the southwest of the Korean Peninsula, and Silla, in the southeast, emerged in the fourth century. Together with Koguryŏ, they are known as the "Three Kingdoms," and they represent Korea's earliest fully historical period. Sandwiched between Paekche and Silla in the south, there was also a confederation of six independent small communities known as Kaya, which was eventually absorbed by Silla.¹⁸ It is unclear to what extent Paekche, Kaya, and Silla were outgrowths from the earlier Korean "Three Han" (which are not to be confused with the Chinese Han dynasty further north) that had occupied the same territory as recently as the third century. In the case of Paekche, Korean legend claims that its founder was a son of the founder of Koguryŏ, and that they were both of Puyŏ descent. (Puyŏ was an older kingdom in the Sungari River basin of central Manchuria.) Despite this legend, the kingdom of Paekche probably really dates from very much later than the founding of Koguryŏ. Nonetheless, early Paekche royal tombs do resemble the distinctive Koguryŏ style of mounded step-pyramid stone sepulchers (while later Paekche tombs conform more to a Southern dynasty Chinese model). On balance, it seems not implausible that Paekche really may have been founded by a ruling elite coming from the north and imposing itself upon a preexisting local population, perhaps in the fourth century.

Buddhism was then introduced to Paekche by a Central Asian monk, Mālānanda, coming from Southern dynasty China in 384. Paekche developed

17 Pai, *Constructing "Korean" Origins*, pp. 122 and 125–26.

18 On Kaya's omission from the traditional "Three Kingdoms," see Mark E. Byington, "Editor's Introduction," in Mark E. Byington (ed.), *Early Korea: The Rediscovery of Kaya in History and Archaeology*, vol. 111 (Cambridge, MA: Korea Institute, Harvard University, 2012), p. 8.

particularly strong ties with the Chinese Southern dynasties and became fervently Buddhist. King Pöp (r. 499–500), the “Dharma King,” was so devout that he banned the killing of animal life and ordered hunting falcons to be released and hunting and fishing equipment destroyed. One splendid Buddhist monastery, completed at the Paekche capital in 527, was named after the contemporary reign period of a Southern dynasty Chinese emperor (pronounced Taet’ong-sa in Korean). It was constructed on the Chinese model, with a rectangular cloister laid out along a north–south axis, and with a freestanding pagoda and icon hall, and a lecture hall set into the surrounding wall, running in progression from south to north. This Korean monastery, in turn, served as a model for Shitennō-ji in Japan a century later.¹⁹

It was from Paekche that Buddhism was introduced to Japan, in either 538 or 552. A priest from Paekche was even named the first official head of the Japanese Buddhist Church in 623, and Buddhist exchanges with Paekche were frequently the vehicle through which the Japanese learned about other developments on the continent. The relationship between Paekche and Japan also had political and military dimensions. When a king of Paekche died in 405, his son and heir was living at the time as a hostage at the Japanese court. The son was returned to Paekche with a Japanese escort, only to find that a younger brother had usurped the throne. With Japanese military support he was able to successfully reclaim his rightful throne.

More clearly than Paekche, Silla, in the southeast, seems to have been a direct outgrowth from one of the third-century (Korean) Three Han. Silla’s first entirely historical ruler was probably Naemul (r. 356–402), who ruled under the native title *maripkan* (which may be related to the familiar steppe title “khan”).²⁰ It was not until 503, according to traditional Korean sources, that the Sillan ruler finally took the Chinese title “king.” During the sixth century, then, Silla began rapidly transforming itself into a Chinese-style state. Chinese-style codes of law were issued in 520. In 536, Chinese-style reign periods, which were used for dating purposes, were adopted. After China was reunified in 589 by the Sui dynasty (581–618) and suddenly became a looming regional superpower, Silla began exploring even more active ties with China. Members of the Sillan royal family went to study at the Chinese capital beginning in 640, and in 649–650 Chinese-style clothing and

19 Jonathan W. Best, *A History of the Early Korean Kingdom of Paekche: Together with an Annotated Translation of the Paekche Annals of the Samguk Sagi* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), pp. 78–9, 81–82, and 134–37.

20 Seth, *Concise History of Korea*, pp. 29 and 46.

the reign-period names of actual Chinese emperors (as distinct from merely Chinese-style ones) began to be used in Silla. Silla was cultivating a military alliance with China that it could turn against its rivals on the peninsula.

By the mid-600s, Paekche had become perhaps the strongest of the three Korean kingdoms, and, in alliance with Koguryŏ, it was nibbling away at Sillan territory. Sillan anxiety is understandable. Meanwhile, the reunified Chinese Sui and subsequent Tang (618–907) dynasties had not been content with reunifying the Chinese heartland but continued to be aggressively expansive. They launched a series of massive invasions of Koguryŏ beginning in 612, which were repeatedly rebuffed. In growing frustration over the failure of frontal assaults on Koguryŏ, Tang dynasty China changed tactics to an alliance with Silla and an attack from the south – starting with Paekche.

A combined Tang Chinese and Sillan attack on Paekche in 660 captured the Paekche king and crown prince. A younger brother of the crown prince, who had been living as a hostage in Japan, was sent back with Japanese support to rally loyalist opposition against the invaders. At a great river battle in 663, however, the combined Chinese and Sillan forces annihilated a Japanese fleet, ending any hope of a Paekche restoration and terminating major Japanese influence on the continent for almost a thousand years.

Koguryŏ was next. In 668, the Tang–Sillan alliance finally conquered Koguryŏ. Although Tang China apparently hoped to subordinate the peninsula to its empire, by 676 Silla had expelled its former Chinese allies, and most of the Korean Peninsula was now unified, under native rule, for the first time ever. However, the current northern border of Korea was not finally stabilized until the fifteenth century, and roughly the northern third of the peninsula was long held by yet another new state, Parhae (713–926), which had been formed by refugees from Koguryŏ together with some other peoples.

Each of the Korean Three Kingdoms contributed to what eventually became Korea, although the modern Korean language probably derives most directly from Sillan. The Three Kingdoms had been frequent adversaries and were each culturally at least somewhat different. The mounded royal tombs of Silla lacked re-entry passageways, for example, unlike the Koguryŏ and Paekche tombs described earlier, and Silla had a distinctive type of antler-shaped gold royal crown. At the same time, the three were also all culturally distinct from China. The practice of tracing family descent through both male and female lines – unlike in China, where descent was always only through the male line – slowed the adoption of hereditary family names, for example, which occurred very much later in Korea than in China. Sillan royal

authority was also balanced against a powerful aristocracy (graded into so-called “bone” ranks). To the end, premodern Korean society always remained more aristocratic than premodern China’s.

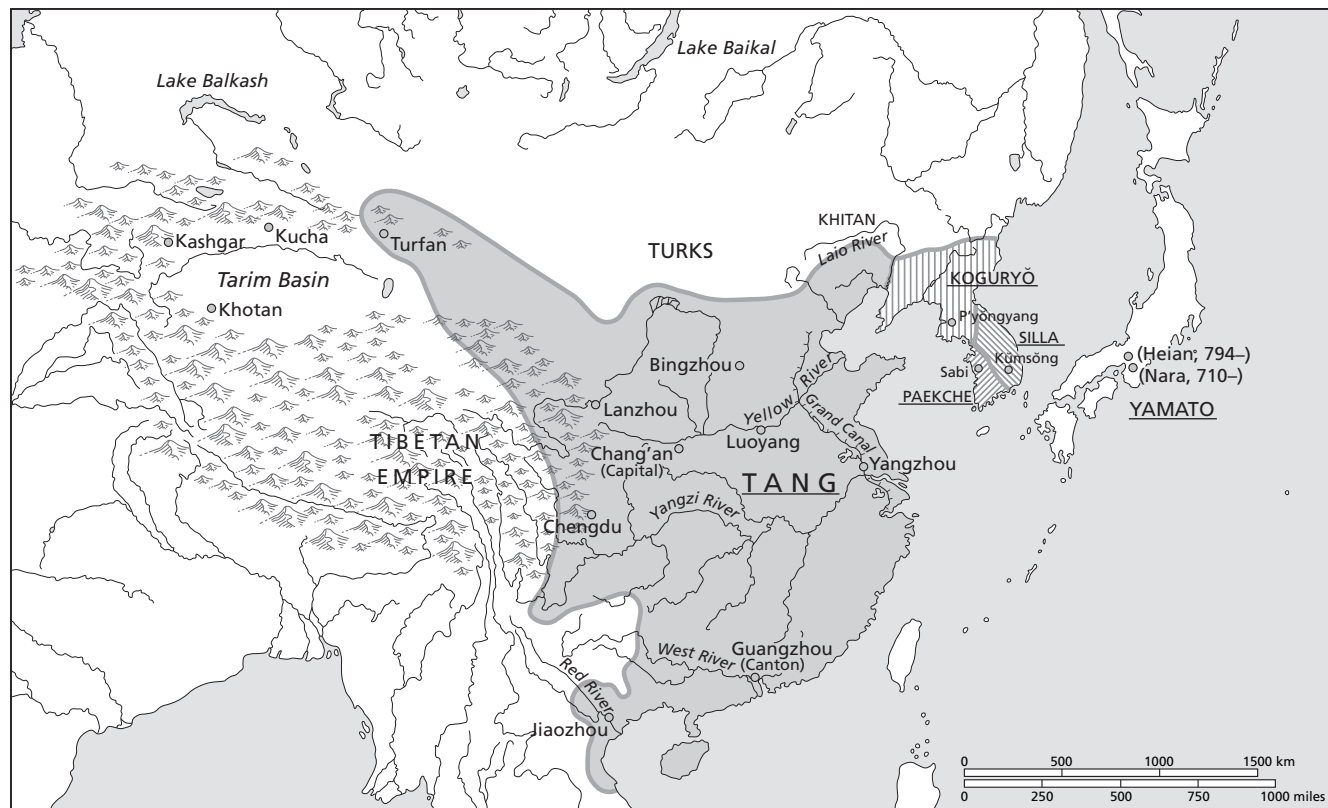
Yet, after the Sillan unification and expulsion of Chinese troops, relations with China became, if anything, closer. Sillans were notably active in trade with Tang dynasty China, and Silla provided the single largest number of foreign students attending Tang schools. Some ninety Sillans are known to have won degrees through the Chinese civil service examination system in late Tang, and some even served in Tang as officials. Over the ensuing centuries Korea also steadily became more Confucian, and Korea remained an autonomous “tributary” of the Chinese empire until the nineteenth century.

Meanwhile, the same Sui dynasty reunification of China in 589 that had transformed the balance of power on the Korean Peninsula also threatened the Japanese islands (see Map 15.3). The Japanese (who initially called their country Yamato – or, in writing, Wa) responded by strengthening and centralizing their government. The earliest written description of Japan, which is contained in a third-century Chinese history, had already depicted a loose coalition of thirty small communities presided over by a priestess-queen called Himiko. Her reign roughly corresponds with the beginning of an “old tomb” period in Japanese history (c. 250–552) that was marked by the erection of large earthen tumuli, not unlike those of contemporary Korea, but in a distinctive “keyhole” shape. As in Korea, the appearance of these tombs may indicate the emergence of larger political alignments, but it was probably not until about the sixth century that a truly centralized state appeared in western Japan.

The seventh century, then, witnessed explosive growth in the use of writing in Japan.²¹ Even as late as the start of the seventh century, many regional chieftains may have remained little more than “autonomous allies of the king,” but over the course of the seventh century Japanese rulers appropriated Chinese-style imperial titles (including what became the standard Japanese variant, *tennō*) and began to formulate an imperial state that could rival China itself.²² Significantly, the oldest surviving native Japanese history, the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters), which was completed in 712, used the ancient Chinese expression all “Under Heaven” ninety times – but in

21 David B. Lurie, *Realms of Literacy: Early Japan and the History of Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), pp. 104–51.

22 Joan R. Piggott, *The Emergence of Japanese Kingship* (Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 91–92, 97, and 127.



Map 15.3 East Asia in 650



Figure 15.4 Todaji, Eastern Great Temple, Nara, Japan (Photograph © Luca Tettoni / Bridgeman Images)

reference to Japan, without even mentioning China.²³ The Chinese-style imperial administrative model was most clearly articulated in a series of codes of penal and administrative law that were compiled beginning as early as 668 (although the oldest surviving code dates from 718). Between 708 and 712 a great new continental-style Japanese capital city, Nara, was constructed, which gives its name to the Nara period (710–784) – the apogee of Chinese-style empire building in Japan (see Fig. 15.4).

The maturation of East Asia

The peoples of Koguryō, Paekche, and Silla all eventually became Korean, while the Xianbei in north China gradually became Chinese. During the first century of its existence, the Northern Wei dynasty, the most significant of all the various Xianbei dynasties, had remained a distinctly Xianbei-ruled state, though most of its subject population presumably were always Chinese.

²³ Herman Ooms, *Imperial Politics and Symbolics in Ancient Japan: The Tenmu Dynasty, 650–800* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), pp. 6–7 and 36.

Beginning in the late fifth century, however, a series of deliberate sinicizing measures were adopted, including requiring the use of the Chinese language at court and the forced adoption of Chinese names. Interestingly enough, the Confucian temple that was built at the Northern Wei capital in 489 was apparently the first such explicitly Confucian temple (*Kong miao*) ever constructed in any Chinese capital. Although a distinction between Xianbei and Chinese identities remained sharp until the late 500s, a new cultural synthesis was brewing.

The ruling families of the Sui and Tang dynasties that reunified China after 589 are said to have been of Chinese descent, but their ancestors had long served Xianbei dynasties, and they had extensively intermarried with the Xianbei. Both the mother and the wife of the Tang dynasty's founder, for example, were Xianbei. The early Tang dynasty also remained richly cosmopolitan. In 630, for example, Tang defeated the Eastern Turks, and for some years thereafter Tang rulers posed simultaneously as Chinese-style emperors of China and Turkic-style *qaghans* (grand khans) of the steppe.²⁴

If the early Tang was a "self-consciously multi-ethnic empire," however, the Tang dynasty ended three centuries later, in 907, much more uniformly Chinese.²⁵ Fundamental shifts occurred over the course of this dynasty that initiated a new, late imperial, Chinese model, which would prove to be highly stable. After Tang, there would be noticeably fewer changes of dynasty in China. Formal examinations had been part of the official selection process in China since the beginning of the empire, but the prestige of the examination system soared during the Tang dynasty as it gradually became a defining institution. Written tests, and the education to prepare for them, became a powerful force for Chinese cultural cohesion. A great Neo-Confucian revival also began in late Tang, while woodblock printing began to significantly increase the availability of written materials (see Fig. 15.5). Trade, both foreign and domestic, accelerated, and by end of the Tang dynasty in the tenth century, China was the world's most developed country, containing perhaps a third of the world's total population.

After the fall of Tang, the northern portions of what later came to be known as Vietnam achieved permanent independence in 939, and began to forge a new Indo-Chinese (and indigenous) cultural fusion that would straddle the boundary between East and Southeast Asia. In Korea there was also a

24 Yihong Pan, *Son of Heaven and Heavenly Qaghan: Sui-Tang China and Its Neighbors* (Bellingham: Western Washington University, 1997), pp. 179–81.

25 Marc Samuel Abramson, *Ethnic Identity in Tang China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. xi.



Figure 15.5 Ninth-century (late Tang) woodblock print on paper, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara and a prayer, from Qian Fo Dong (Thousand Buddhas Cave), Dunhuang (© Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved)

change of dynasty in the tenth century, as Silla government weakened and the last Silla king abdicated in 935. In Japan, the tenth century roughly coincides with a major watershed, as Chinese-style imperial institutions became increasingly irrelevant, imperial power atrophied, and a new and uniquely Japanese class of provincial warriors – incipient samurai – began to assert themselves. A distinctively Japanese culture also began to coalesce, exemplified by Lady Murasaki's (978–1016) classic novel the *Tale of Genji*. By the tenth century, the familiar outlines of “traditional” East Asia were beginning to take shape.

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Regional study: Confucianism and the state

XINZHONG YAO

'Confucianism' was derived from the Latin transliteration of 'Confucius' (*kong fuzi* 孔夫子 Master Kong, a reverent title for Kong Qiu 孔丘 or Kong Zhongni 孔仲尼, 551–479 BCE), the foremost thinker and culture-shaper in the history of China. 'Confucius-ism' was in fact coined later in the nineteenth century for the *ru* 儒 tradition that was interpreted by Jesuit missionaries in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century China, rightly, as the 'school of scholars' or 'sect of the *literati*'.¹ The rendering of the *ru* tradition into 'Confucianism' was clearly intended to show that the tradition was initiated by Confucius or was focused on the faith in, and the teaching of, Confucius, following the similar line as 'Buddha-ism' or 'Christ-ianity'.² This meaning of a religiously enriched term might have truth in the reality at that time, but may well be misleading as far as the origin and nature of the *ru* tradition is concerned.³ In this chapter we shall examine what exactly Confucianism was, how it came into this stage of world history, and why it became such an influential ideological power that shaped the political culture of China during the period from 1200 BCE to 900 CE. In our enquiries a particular focus will be placed on the questions concerning its implications for, and impact on, political institutions in China and beyond: how did Confucians (*ru*), descended from ritual masters and educationists, help shape a unique type of statecraft and state ideology in China which subsequently led to the rise of a 'Confucian sphere' in East Asia? How much

1 Paul A. Rule, *K'ung-tzu or Confucius: The Jesuit Interpretation of Confucianism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), p. 2.

2 Lionel M. Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions & Universal Civilization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 4–5.

3 While acknowledging the inaccuracy of 'Confucianism' in referring to the Chinese tradition, we nevertheless use it in this chapter to refer to the *ru* rather than a more awkward term such as 'Ruism'. It must be pointed out, however, that 'Confucianism' here is only a convenient word for the tradition that, although bound to the teaching of Confucius, encompasses a wider range of multifaceted ideological and political forces that shaped the culture of China and other parts of East Asia.

influence did Confucians exert on government via education and moral cultivation that formed an explicit or implicit political legacy in China and extended to other countries such as Korea and Japan? These questions cannot be properly answered unless we come first to examine the origin and evolution of Confucianism both as a doctrine and as an ideology that was substantially involved in the establishing and justifying of political power.

Confucianism: origins

In the morning of a day in the fifth century BCE, probably not too far away from the year of 479 BCE when the thinker died, Confucius uttered the following sentence which was duly recorded in the *Analects*: 'I am getting dreadfully old. It has been a long time since I last saw in a dream the Duke of Zhou.'⁴ Who was the Duke, a cultural hero in the heart and mind of Confucius, who apparently appeared frequently in his dreams when his physical conditions were not so declined? What kind of relation was there between the Duke and the formation of the 'ancient culture' that Confucius vowed to transmit and to expand?

The Duke of Zhou, with his personal name as Dan 旦, was a son of King Wen (r. 1099/56–1050/45 BCE), the founder of the Zhou dynasty (c. 1045–256 BCE), and a younger brother of King Wu (r. 1049/45–1043 BCE) who, after the death of their father King Wen, launched a powerful military campaign against and finally overthrew the Shang dynasty (c. 1766 – c. 1045 BCE), probably around 1045 BCE.⁵ Following the death of King Wu the year after this conquest, the Duke enthroned the young son of King Wu as King Cheng (r. 1042/35–1006 BCE), and he himself acted as the Prince Regent (r. 1042–1036 BCE) for his nephew. Apart from his success in consolidating the

4 Lunyu, in *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Simon Leys (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), 7.5, p. 29.

5 The dates for the Shang and Zhou dynasties including their reigning rulers used in this chapter are derived from 'Table 1. Reign dates', in Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From The Origin of Civilization to 221 BC* (Cambridge University Press), 1999, p. 25, with references to the Chronology provided in William Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom (eds.), *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. xxvii–xxxiii. According to Edward L. Shaughnessy's 'suggestion', 'the date of the Zhou conquest of Shang – the pivotal date in ancient Chinese history – must be slightly later than 1050 B.C.' Loewe and Shaughnessy (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*, p. 23.

new empire and suppressing rebellions,⁶ the most important contribution made by the Duke was said to be his institutionalising of a 'ritual system' (religious, political and ethical codes) for the Zhou. The ritual system was later claimed in Confucian texts both as the central element of the religio-ethico-political culture of the Zhou dynasty and as the chief power or tool for sustaining this culture; it was also believed to be the sublime representative form and content of the 'ancient culture' to which Confucius devoted all his time and energy to preserve, expand and transmit to later generations.⁷

This system, known as *li yue* 禮樂 in Chinese, literally meaning 'rites' and 'music', played a significant role in the formation of the *ru* or Confucian tradition. Ritual and music were an essential part of religious and political institutions that characterised the civilisation of early China,⁸ and the Zhou inevitably inherited and transformed the rituals and music that were formed and practised in earlier times.⁹ Therefore to trace the origin of Confucianism, we are necessarily led to the ritual system of the later Shang dynasty when sacrifices to spirits and ancestors were central to the state administration.¹⁰ Some modern scholars have even gone further to claim that predecessors of Confucians were, in fact, the dancers and musicians in religious rituals in the Shang and early Zhou, who then became ritual masters and music teachers and were specialists in the 'six arts' (*liu yi* 六藝), namely history, poetry,

6 'When King Wu died, Cheng was only a child. The Duke of Zhou acted as a screen for King Cheng and succeeded King Wu in order to keep the alliance of the world . . . took charge of the registers of the Son of Heaven, heard judicial cases of the empire . . . killed Guanshu and laid waste to the capital of Yin . . . educated, admonished, taught, and guided Cheng that he should be able to follow in the footsteps of Wen and Wu.' *Xunzi* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1999), 8.1.

7 Confucius attached himself to the system: 'The Zhou is King resplendent in culture, having before it the example of the two previous dynasties. I am for the Zhou.' *The Analects*, in *Confucius: The Analects (Lun yu)*, trans. D. C. Lau (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 3.14, p. 69.

8 Bu Gong 卜工 suggested that the springing-up, evolving, refining and maturing of the ritual system was the unique experience of ancient China and was the chief characteristic of Chinese civilisation. *Wenming qiyuan de zhongguo moshi* 文明起源的中国模式 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2007), p. 3.

9 Confucius had a strong sense of ritual continuity. For him, 'The Yin [Shang] built on the rites of the Hsia [Xia]. What was added and what was omitted can be known. The Chou [Zhou] built on the rites of the Yin. What was added and what was omitted can be known. Should there be a successor to the Chou, even a hundred generations hence can be known.' *Confucius: The Analects (Lun yu)*, p. 66.

10 For example, the ancestral temple in the Shang era was where kings held their audiences with officials and feudal lords, orders concerning both civil and military matters were issued, the ruler and ministers heard news of victory in battle, and they dispensed rewards to meritorious officials. Lester James Bilsky, *The State Religion of Ancient China* (Taipei: The Chinese Association for Folklore, 1975), p. 66.

music, astrology, archery and mathematics, which were closely related to rituals in the Western Zhou period (1045?–771 BCE).

This origin points directly to two features that distinguish the Confucian tradition from other schools of thought in early China. First, Confucianism was associated with rituals that were closely related to political institutions. Secondly, it was rooted in education. These two characteristics explain why Liu Xin 劉歆 (? BCE – 23 CE), a leading scholar of the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), located the formation of Confucianism in the profession of ritual masters and asserted that Confucians were later characteristic of a devotion to the ‘six classics’ (namely, *The Book of Poetry*, *The Book of History*, *The Book of Rites*, *The Book of Music*, *The Book of Changes* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*), and why he traced the early ‘Confucians’ to a government office (*situ zhi guan* 司徒之官, Ministry of Education) whose function was said to ‘assist the ruler to follow the way of the yin-yang and to enlighten [the people] by education’ (*zhu renjun, shun yinyang, ming jiaohua* 助人君, 順陰陽, 明教化).¹¹

Evidence shows that a system of formal education in China was instituted by the Shang court. Referring to a divination question recorded in the oracle bone inscriptions concerning whether or not it would rain when the aristocratic sons returned home from their school, Yang Kuan confirmed that there was already official education during the Shang, that the state education in the Western Zhou further developed into a comprehensive system comprising primary schools for the young (*xiao xue* 小學) and the higher education (*da xue* 大學) for adults, and that the higher education was mainly concerned with ritual, music and archery.¹² The state education system continued in the Eastern Zhou (771–221 BCE), but at the same time private education also sprang up before the time of Confucius. Confucius became the most famous leading master in private education, and his reputation was confirmed by the large followers he gathered throughout his life. In transmitting ancient culture, Confucius made use of certain earlier records as textbooks for education. According to Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145?–86? BCE), the author of *Shiji* 史記 (*The Records of the Historian*):

In the time of Confucius, the House of Chou [Zhou] had declined and the rites and music had fallen into neglect. The *Shih* (Book of Odes) and *Shu* (Book of History) had become defective. (Confucius) made researches into and transmitted the rites of the Three Dynasties (Hsia, Shang and Chou), and

¹¹ *Hanshu in Ershisi shi* [Twenty-Four Histories] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), vol. 11, p. 1728.

¹² Yang Kuan 楊寬, *Xi Zhou Shi* 西周史 [The History of the Western Zhou Dynasty] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1999), pp. 664 and 674.

arranged in order the recitals in the *Shu* . . . Thus the records of the *Shu* and the *Li Chi* (Book of Rites) both come to us from Confucius.¹³

The era in which Confucius was born and lived was called the Spring and Autumn period (722–479 BCE), a period during which the Zhou's feudal system had become fragmented.¹⁴ The old order of social and political life was rapidly collapsing and the new one was yet to be established. This distressing reality forced great thinkers of the time to reflect on the cause of social chaos and to search for ways to rebuild political order. Confucius campaigned for restoring the early Zhou tradition through an enhanced cultural transmission as a way to re-establish social and political stability and harmony. He believed that chaos and disorder arose from the misuse and abuse of ritual/propriety (*li*) and music (*yue*), and that these misuses and abuses could not be corrected under a bad government in which neither the ruler nor his ministers behaved in accordance with the true values of their roles. This prompted him to focus on instituting a virtuous government, in which the ruling classes acted and behaved in the way established in the rites. For him, what made a government good was the power of moral virtues rather than the terror of cruel and punitive laws. He believed that moral virtues could produce trust and faith in the people, while penal measures might stop wrongdoing momentarily but could not address the root of bad behaviour. In order to set up guidelines for good political, family and communal life, Confucius reinterpreted the meaning and methods of learning and education, which he believed were essential for cultivating a good character and for encouraging people to become morally noble and politically capable. This idealised moral character was called *junzi* 君子, a gentleman or virtuous person who was believed to have great leverage in improving the quality of communal life, who could be an effective tool for overcoming current problems and lead people to a refined and redefined world of goodness and harmony.

In a mainly educational career, Confucius was also involved in policy-making and political counselling in order to put his ideas into practice and even to change the course of history, which included his participation in the administration of his home state, Lu (502–497 BCE), and his travels among

13 Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese History*, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton University Press, 1952), vol. 1, p. 44.

14 Under the king the empire was divided into many states. The princes and dukes of the states took the king as the 'Son of Heaven' and as their chief commander. When the grasp of Zhou kings over the states weakened, however, the administrative system began to collapse. Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 22.

different states in search of a 'virtuous' ruler who consented to his vision and could take his policies into the core of the state administration (497–484 BCE). None of these can be said to have been successful, however, and he returned home and instead devoted the rest of his life solely to educating students and editing classical texts.

Confucius was born an ordinary man, and while he became an influential educator and political adviser during his lifetime, he gained an increasingly huge following and admiration after his death, mainly through his students and followers which eventually made him the top culture-maker and standard-setter in China (see Confucian temple in Qufu, Fig. 16.1).¹⁵ In the words of Karl Jaspers, Confucius was one of the FOUR 'paradigmatic individuals' – 'It would be difficult to find a fifth of equal historical stature' – who 'by being what they were did more than other men to determine the history of man. Their influence extended through two millennia down to our own day.'¹⁶

Confucianism: evolution and institutionalisation

Tradition holds that Confucius had 3,000 students, among whom 72 were his close disciples. These students and their followers naturally developed different understandings and interpretations of Confucius' teaching, which eventually led to the rise of different sects within Confucianism. According to Han Fei (?–233 BCE), by the time of the Warring States period (479–221 BCE) there were already eight prominent Confucian schools.¹⁷ Among the eight, two exerted a lasting impact on the evolution of the Confucian tradition: the School of Zi Si 子思 (Kong Ji 孔汲, ?–402 BCE) and Mengzi 孟子 (Meng Ke 孟軻, 372?–289? BCE) and the School of Xunzi 荀子 (Xun Qing 荀卿, 313?–238? BCE). Although there were differences among these schools, without these later Confucians the master's teachings and influence might have been lost.

15 Several hundred years after his death, Sima Qian remarked in the 'Biography of Confucius' that 'There have been many kings, emperors and great men in history, who enjoyed fame and honor while they lived and came to nothing at their death, while Confucius, who was but a common scholar clad in a cotton gown, became the acknowledged Master of scholars for over ten generations. All people in China who discuss the six arts, from the emperors, kings and princes down, regard the Master as the final authority.' Lin Yu-tang (ed. and trans.), *The Wisdom of Confucius* (Mumbai: Wilco Publishing House, 2005), p. 78.

16 Karl Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers: The Foundations* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), p. 6.

17 Han Fei Tzu, *Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 119.

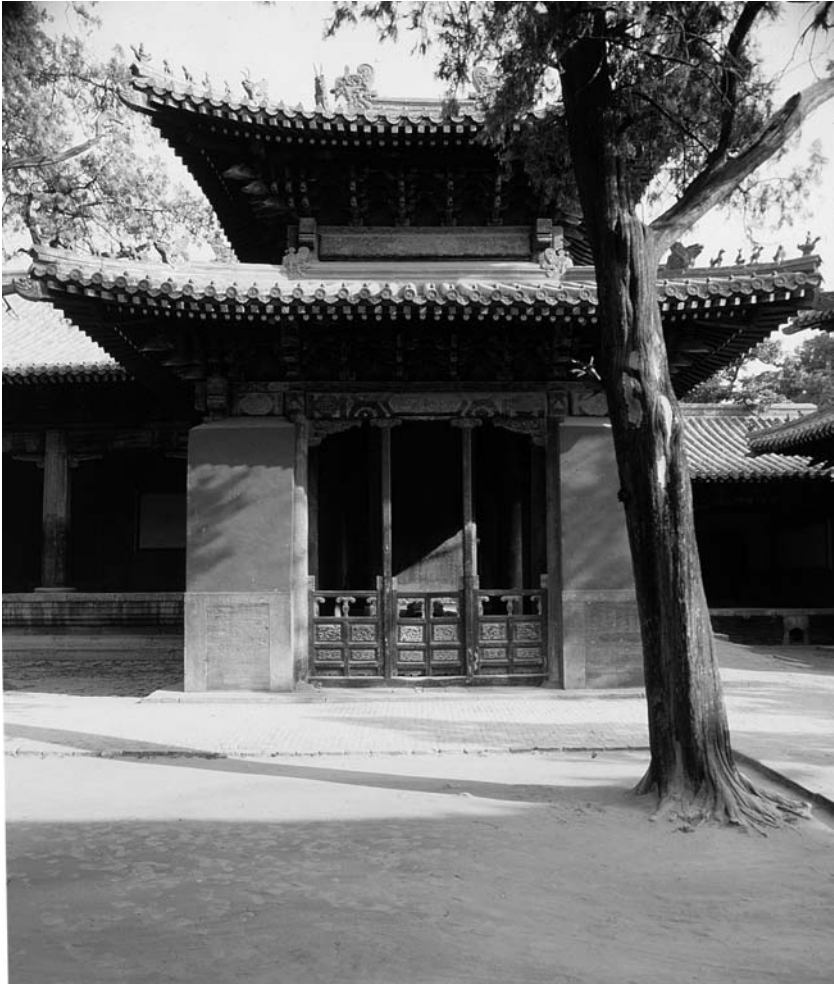


Figure 16.1 The temple of Confucius at Qufu (Werner Forman Archive / Bridgeman Images)

Zi Si was the grandson of Confucius and is claimed to be the author of the *Doctrine of the Mean*, one of the Four Books that became central to the later Confucian tradition,¹⁸ while Mengzi is credited with authoring another of the Four Books that bears his name. Zi Si and Mengzi shared the common

¹⁸ *The Analects of Confucius*, *Mencius*, the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*zhong yong*), and the *Great Learning* (*da xue*).

conviction that human nature is innately good, and that by extending the original heart/mind (*xin* 心), that is, by practising humaneness (*ren* 仁) and righteousness (*yi* 義) and by cultivating sincerity (*cheng* 誠) within, humans are able to understand Heaven, to achieve sagehood or to be one with Heaven and Earth. Mengzi admired Confucius and proclaimed him the greatest sage.¹⁹ He followed Zi Si in furthering a religio-ethical discourse which claimed that Confucianism originated in the works and lives of ancient sage-kings and was exemplified in the teachings of Confucius. Throughout his life, Mengzi vigorously defended the Confucian way, engaging in a fight on two fronts: on the one side against the misuse of political power by dukes and princes (*zhuhou fangzi* 諸侯放恣), and on the other against 'the pervasive doctrines' of non-Confucian scholars (*chushi hengyi* 處士橫議). Like Confucius, Mengzi travelled extensively around the states, offering advice on the 'kingly way' (*wang dao* 王道) or 'benevolent or humane government' (*ren zheng* 仁政) in opposition to the 'way of a despot' (*ba dao* 霸道). He attacked fiercely what he described as heresies and took it as his life's mission to drive away the doctrines of Yang Zhu 楊朱 (440?–360? BCE) and Mo Di 墨狄 (479?–381? BCE) and to banish excessive views and heresies, because he believed that 'If the way of Yang and Mo does not subside and the way of Confucius is not proclaimed, the people will be deceived by heresies and the path of morality will be blocked.'²⁰

The architect of the second most influential school in the Confucian tradition was the sophisticated and pragmatic thinker Xunzi. To safeguard the Confucian way, Xunzi not only attacked non-Confucian doctrines as heresies but also criticised some of the Confucian sects, including that of Mengzi, as 'following the model of the ancient kings in a fragmentary way', because 'being mysterious and enigmatic, they lacked a satisfactory theoretical basis' and were therefore branded as 'vulgar' Confucians.²¹ Despite this, Xunzi absorbed elements from many sources available at the time into his own grand theory for constructing a comprehensive Confucian system; for example, his discussion of Heaven (*tian* 天) as Nature is derived from a Daoist understanding of the metaphysical Way, while his interest in logic shows the influence of the School of Logicians (*ming jia* 名家). Unlike Confucius, who stressed the importance of humaneness or benevolence (*ren* 仁), and Mengzi, who placed an emphasis on rightness or moral principle (*yi* 義), Xunzi made

19 '[I]t is my hope and wish to follow the example of Confucius . . . Ever since man came into this world, there has never been another Confucius.' *Mencius*, trans. D. C. Lau (London: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 79.

20 *Mencius*, p. 114. 21 *Xunzi*, 8.18, p. 193.

codes of conduct, or ritual/propriety (*li* 禮) and law (*fa* 法), prominent in his theoretical construction and defined ‘Confucians’ as those who ‘model themselves after the Ancient Kings’, ‘exalt ritual and moral principle’ and ‘esteem their superiors’.²² Unlike Mengzi, who idealistically associated humans with ethico-spiritual Heaven, Xunzi consciously separated humans from natural Heaven and denied the commonly held correspondence between political conditions and heavenly will, or between human success or failure and changes in nature. From the perspective of a naturalist philosophy, he argued that humans were innately driven by desires and naturally tended to compete for resources necessary for satisfying these desires. These natural instincts could cause disorder and chaos in community and state if not restrained and guided properly. He regarded this as evidence that human nature was innately evil and that virtue was the product of *posterior* training and cultivation, which fundamentally set him apart from Mengzi. Notwithstanding these views, Xunzi was not totally opposed to the School of Zi Si and Mengzi. He insisted that despite these original tendencies towards evil, human nature could be transformed by ritual/propriety and by learning and education into a more virtuous nature, and that peace, harmony and goodness could prevail in the world through kingly government. He strongly believed that humans were capable of accumulating wisdom and virtues, and of making ‘whole of one’s inner power’, acquiring ‘a divine clarity of intelligence’ and fully realising ‘a sagelike mind’.²³ In other words, Xunzi was arguing for the same universality of the sagehood as Mengzi: ‘it is clear that the man in the street can become a Yu [sage-king]’, because what makes Yu a sage is his ‘use of humaneness, righteousness, the model of law and rectitude’ and ‘in each of these four there are rational principles that we can know and which we are capable of putting into practice’.²⁴

Confucians suffered a huge setback in the hands of the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty (221–210 BCE) who had adopted Legalism, the arch rival of Confucianism, as the ideological basis of state policies and overwhelmed the other six warring states in his powerful military campaigns. With the advent of the Western Han (202 BCE – 9 CE), however, Confucians found themselves at a turning point, facing both opportunities and challenges. Han Confucians grasped these opportunities and took upon themselves the challenges necessary to transform Confucianism into a new type of doctrine that was closely associated with the needs of consolidating the Han empire. To

22 Xunzi, 8.2, p. 165. 23 Xunzi, 1.6, p. 9. 24 Xunzi, 23.14, p. 763.

meet the new needs of the empire, Confucian scholars formed a new and eclectic doctrine by moulding into a single system the different ideas of Mengzi and Xunzi and by incorporating into Confucianism various other useful elements including those of Huang-Lao Daoism, the Yin-yang and the Five Elements (*wuxing* 五行, five agencies or activities), Mohism and Legalism. A 'theological' or metaphysical doctrine of interaction between spiritual-natural Heaven and humans (*Tianren ganying* 天人感應), for example, was established and consequently became the tool by which the authoritarian and authoritative power of the emperor was both justified and restricted. There was also a strong drive to develop the cult of Confucius, both as the ancient master and as the culture-maker, which eventually led to it becoming part of the state religion during the East Han dynasty (25–220 CE).²⁵

Among Western Han scholars, Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (195?–105? BCE) was the most prominent and played an instrumental role in facilitating the victory of revised Confucianism. Dong submitted three memorials in response to Emperor Wu's (r. 140–87 BCE) enquiries by proposing new ways to reform the government and to unify governmental rules and regulations. Dong encouraged the emperor to practise the five virtues (humaneness/benevolence, rightness/righteousness, ritual/propriety, wisdom and trustfulness), telling him, 'if you do this, you will receive blessings from Heaven and from the spirits, while your good administration will spread to the four corners of the world, and all will be benefited'.²⁶ In addition to these memorials, Dong wrote many treatises, most of which are preserved in the book entitled *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu Fanlu* 春秋繁露).

Perceiving the urgent need of a unified ideology for the unified empire, Confucians became more and more exclusive with respect to other schools of thought. Dong made it clear in his memorial to the emperor, for example, that 'whatever is not encompassed by the Six Disciplines and the arts of Confucius should be suppressed and not allowed to continue further, and evil

25 Sima Qian recorded the First Emperor of the Han dynasty 'worshipped Confucius with grand offerings (of cows, sheep and pigs, a great honor)'. Lin Yu-tang, *The Wisdom of Confucius*, p. 77. John Shryock provided a detailed study of how the cult of Confucius evolved: 'The first clear instance of a regular cult of Confucius in the schools,' however, did not happen until 'the third month of the second year [57 CE] of the reign of Yun-ping, when the emperor Ming ordered that the schools in all the larger cities should sacrifice to the sage'. For Shryock, 'The cult of Confucius was a hero worship deliberately adopted by the state at the instance of a social group, the scholars, who acknowledged the leadership of the sage. This hero worship occupied a place in the state religion between the cults of nature deities and the worship of ancestors, from both of which it borrowed.' John Shryock, *The Origin and Development of the State Cult of Confucius* (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1966), pp. 87, 97, 103, and 105.

26 Shryock, *The Origin and Development of the State Cult of Confucius*, p. 53.

and vain theories [should] be stamped out. Only then will unity be achieved, the laws be made clear, and the people know what to follow.'²⁷ Emperor Wu eventually took this advice and implemented it in governmental policies, decreeing that no other teachings apart from Confucianism be endorsed by the state. This marked the beginning of Confucianism as the official ideology and of Confucius as the state cult, becoming one of the three state sacrifices, along with sacrifices to Heaven and to royal ancestors, that lasted until the beginning of the twentieth century.

While practising Confucianism, the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 CE) also saw the introduction of Buddhism from India and Central Asia to China and the increased popularity/significance of religious Daoism. After an initial stagnation which was the consequence of the perceived incompatibility between Chinese and non-Chinese cultures, Buddhism rapidly accommodated itself to the Confucian moral system and to the needs of the people, who suffered from war, famine and a longing for a sense of the spiritual, and spread to all corners of China during the periods of Wei-Jin and the Southern-Northern dynasties (220–581 CE). At the same time, as Arthur Cotterell notes: 'The loss of the ancient heartland of China [to the "barbarian" tribes in the north] raised doubts as to whether Confucian ideology was a sufficiently strong shield in troubled times.'²⁸ Under the joint pressure of Buddhism and Daoism, Confucians had to retreat on many fronts and were forced to make significant changes to their doctrinal and practical contents in order to survive in a less favourable political, religious and intellectual environment.

A three-dimensional structure of ideology was gradually embraced by the people where Confucianism was responsible for education and politics, Daoism for spiritual living, and Buddhism for after-death wellbeing. Some scholars even championed a new doctrine of the three-in-one: 'Confucius, Lao Tzu, and Buddha were one, and the apparent differences between them were caused by customs, rules, and ceremonies, which were outward appearances', but not substantial.²⁹ A great effort was made to reconcile Buddhism to Confucianism, and in the terms of Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–591) Buddhism was posited as the teaching for the inner realm and Confucianism for the outer world.³⁰ In the period of the Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–906) dynasties,

27 de Bary and Bloom (eds.), *Sources of Chinese Traditions*, vol. 1, p. 311.

28 Arthur Cotterell, *China: A History* (London: Pimlico, 1995), p. 135.

29 Shryock, *The Origin and Development of the State Cult of Confucius*, p. 188.

30 Yan Zhitui, *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 [*The Admonitions for the Yan Clan*], trans. Zong Fuchang (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2004), p. 250.

although Buddhism and Daoism were popular, both with ordinary people and in the court, Confucians nevertheless gradually regained the control of administration, by means of education and civil service examinations. Tang Confucians, in particular Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), took it as their mission in life to ‘restore a Confucian social and political order to a society long acclimated to Buddhist and Daoist teachings’.³¹ Han Yu, for example, argued that there had been a fine tradition in China, transmitted from the ancient sage-kings, Yao, Shun, Yu, Tang, King Wen, King Wu and the Duke of Zhou, to Confucius and Mengzi. He claimed that after Mengzi the transmission of the Way had stopped, and that if the transmission succeeded, people would enjoy peace and harmony, and the state would flourish (see the statuette of Confucius, Fig. 16.2). The Confucian efforts as such paved the way for the rise of a new form of Confucianism, what we call ‘Neo-Confucianism’ in the West, during the Song dynasty (906–1271 CE).

Theoretical foundation of Confucian politics

The natural starting point for a discussion of Confucian politics is the concept of divine kingship, which can be traced to the earliest records of shaman diviners who conducted divination on behalf of the state. Confucians inherited and transformed this concept into the core of their politics. The reinterpretation and expansion of the political value of Heaven and the Mandate of Heaven were the first steps. Early Confucian political thought was fed on religious beliefs and practices, and was centred on a religio-ethical conviction that human rulers must be responsible to Heaven and that their virtues must be answerable to the ‘Mandate of Heaven’ (*tian ming* 天命). According to one of the Five Classics,³² *The Book of History* (*shu* 書), ‘Heaven graciously distinguishes the virtuous . . . Heaven punishes the guilty’, and the greatest possible crime for a king would be committed if he did ‘not reverence Heaven above, and inflicted calamities on the people below’.³³ In *The Book of Poetry* (*shi* 詩), the founding king of the Zhou was hailed as the bearer of the great Mandate of Heaven, which enabled him to overwhelm the Shang.³⁴ However great a state was, it would collapse as soon as Heaven withdrew its

31 de Bary and Bloom (eds.), *Sources of Chinese Traditions*, vol. 1, p. 568.

32 *The Book of History* (*shu*), *The Book of Poetry* (*shi*), *The Book of Changes* (*yi*), *The Book of Rites* (*li*) and *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (*chunqiu*).

33 *The Chinese Classics*, trans. James Legge (London: Trubner & Co., 1865), vol. 111, pp. 74 and 284.

34 de Bary and Bloom (eds.), *Sources of Chinese Traditions*, vol. 1, p. 38.

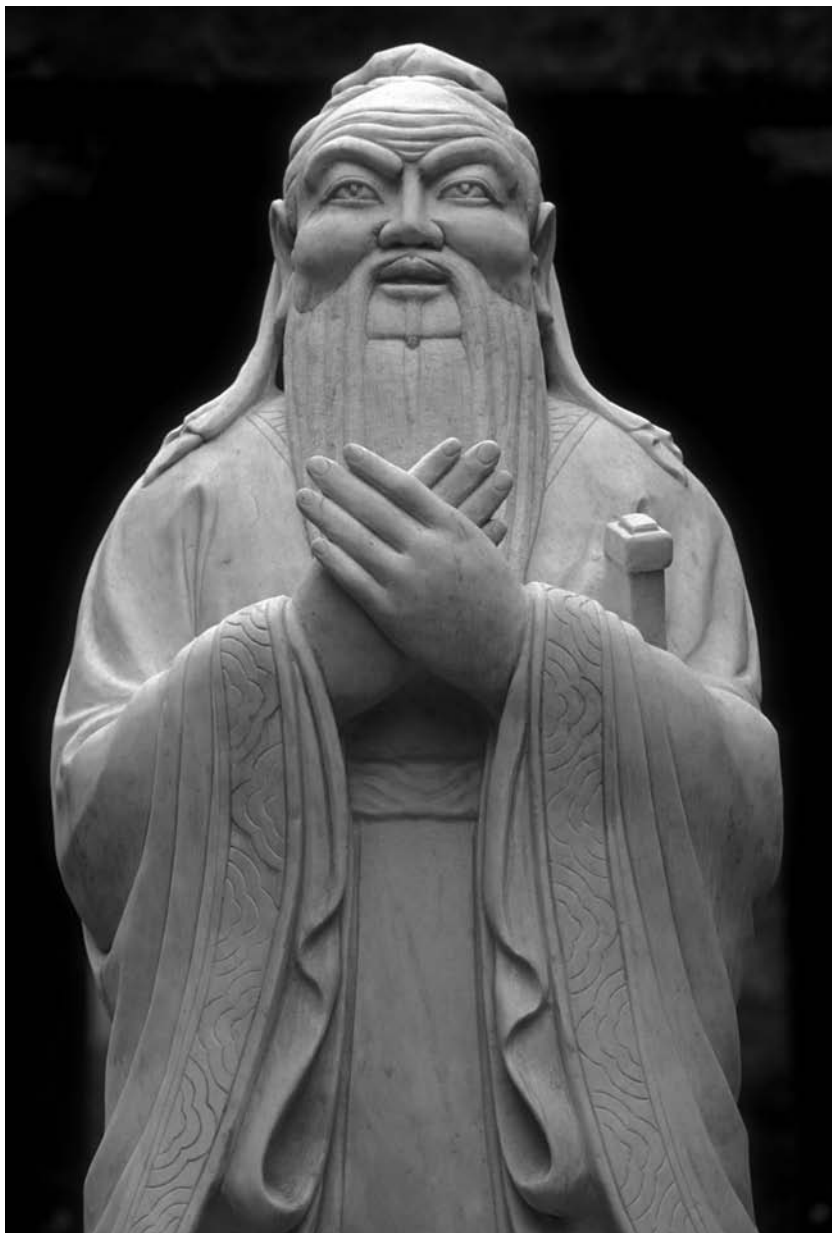


Figure 16.2 Statue of Confucius at Confucius Temple, Beijing, China (Robert Fried / Alamy)

mandate. The only way to keep the Mandate was to ensure that 'the king should have reverent care for his virtue', and it was only because the rulers of earlier dynasties 'did not reverently care for their virtue that they early let their Mandate fall'.³⁵ The message Confucians tried hard to deliver to contemporary politicians was loud and clear: no government would last unless it was blessed by Heaven, and no rulers could be justified unless they cultivated virtues and acted morally in exercising administrative power.

Prominent in Confucian classics is the usage of the title for the king, 'Son of Heaven' (*tian zi* 天子). The Son of Heaven was said to rule 'over the myriad regions, and all officers depend on and reverence him'.³⁶ This title linked human rulers to Heaven in a son to father relation, recognising the central position of the king and adding divine legitimacy to his power.³⁷ While as the Son of Heaven the king enjoyed the privileges of ruling over the world and mediating between Heaven and earth, he bore huge responsibility towards the people on earth and the spiritual authority in Heaven. This can be seen from Mengzi who not only confirmed that 'Heaven alone can grant success'³⁸ but also identified Heaven or the Mandate of Heaven with the people or the people's wishes, quoting from the *Book of History* that 'Heaven sees with the eyes of its people. Heaven hears with the ears of its people'.³⁹ Mengzi argued that the king would be abandoned by Heaven if he behaved like a tyrant; however, if he exercised 'humane/benevolent government' towards people, then he would be regarded as the saviour and welcomed by the people with food and drink. Mengzi took the 'way of a despot (*ba dao*)' to be the rule by force with harsh punishment and killings and to be the way to lose the empire (*tian xia* 天下, literally meaning 'under the sky'). By contrast, a kingly government was the way to win and keep the empire: to win the empire, the king must first win the people and to win the people, the king must first win their hearts.⁴⁰

To highlight the sacredness of kingship, Confucians added the word for 'sages' or 'sagehood' to the word 'king' and formed a new term, the

35 de Bary and Bloom (eds.), *Sources of Chinese Traditions*, vol. 1, p. 36.

36 *The Chinese Classics*, p. 248.

37 Julia Ching, *Mysticism and Kingship in China: The Heart of Chinese Wisdom* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

38 Mengzi, in *Mencius*, trans. Lau, 1B:14, p. 71.

39 Mengzi, in *Mencius*, 5A:5, p. 144. This comes from the *Book of History*: 'Heaven hears and sees as our people hear and see; Heaven brightly approves and displays its terror, as our people brightly approve and would awe:— such connection there is between the upper and lower worlds! How reverent ought the masters of earth to be!' *The Chinese Classics*, p. 74.

40 Mengzi, in *Mencius*, 4A.9, p. 121.

'sage-king' (*sheng wang* 聖王). In Confucian texts, the first appearance of the term is found in the *Mengzi*, where Mengzi deplored the fact that 'After the death of Yao and Shun, the way of the Sages declined' and 'No sage kings have appeared since then.'⁴¹ While in *Mengzi* the sage-king is confined to a couple of early cultural heroes who had been appraised and admired by Confucius, Xunzi refilled this title with state responsibilities and gave it to tens of former kings (*xian wang* 先王), identifying the 'way of the sage-king' with the administrative tasks of employing people according to their virtue and abilities. He further defined 'the sageliness' as a comprehensive grasp of human relationships, and the kingship as a comprehensive grasp of the regulations for the government, while 'a comprehensive grasp of both is sufficient to become the ridgepole for the world'.⁴²

The idea of the sage-king was regarded as the pivotal point in Confucian politics, underlying the whole structure of state administration. Through analysing the Chinese character for king (*wang*, 王), Dong Zhongshu instituted the king at the religious, moral and political centre of the world. In his words, the three horizontal lines of the character are connected by a vertical line running through the centre to designate the king: 'The three horizontal lines represent Heaven, Earth and humankind, while the vertical line that connects them through the center represents comprehending the Way ... one who acts as king is no more than Heaven's agent.'⁴³

Confucius did not simply accept the earlier beliefs in Heaven and sage-kingship but, instead, developed or expanded them into an ethico-religio-political system. Strongly believing that Heaven had produced virtue in him and had given him a mission to transmit ancient culture,⁴⁴ Confucius rendered political administration an exercise in ethical virtues, in the sense that only moral qualities were believed to lead to effective governing. He equated the ruling by virtue with the Pole Star that would remain in its own place while the multitude of stars revolved around it.⁴⁵ For him, to govern was to set the right example for people to follow, as he believed that, cultivated by those who were in high position, moral virtues would naturally produce trust

41 *Menzzi*, in *Mencius*, 3B.9, pp. 113–14. In the Zuo's commentaries on the Spring and Autumn Annals, the term is used widely, for example, 'The sage kings therefore first secured the welfare of the people, and then put forth their strength in serving the Spirits.' *The Ch'un Tsew, with The Tso Chuen*, trans. James Legge (London: Trubner & Co., 1872), p. 48.

42 *Xunzi*, 5.10, p. 107; 11.13, p. 339; and 21.15, p. 701.

43 de Bary and Bloom (eds.), *Sources of Chinese Traditions*, p. 301.

44 *Lunyu*, in *Confucius: The Analects (Lun yu)*, trans. Lau, 7.23, p. 89, and 9.5, p. 96.

45 *Lunyu*, in *Confucius: The Analects (Lun yu)*, 2.1, p. 61.

and faith in the people. While calling on everybody to be a virtuous person through learning and practising, Confucius emphasised that it was more important for political and social *elites* to cultivate virtues, because their virtues would powerfully affect or shape how the people of a lower status behaved and led their lives.⁴⁶

By emphasising that human rule must be matched with the virtue of Heaven, Confucians placed politics as being essential to the process of education and self-cultivation. In fact, most Confucians can be said to be educationalists, as they gathered around them a larger or smaller group of students who studied classics and exegeses from their master, and who in turn transmitted their learning to future generations. Confucian education must not be thought of as we know of it today. It was more about character cultivation and about the effect this cultivation could have on other people, family and state administration. Therefore, one of the criteria for education was whether or not students were able to speak adequately and to behave properly in accordance with what is required in the books on poetry and rites.⁴⁷ Concerning the effect of one's behaviour upon others, we may gain an insight from the following reply Confucius made to the question of how to make people respectful, loyal and zealous: 'Approach them with dignity and they will be respectful. Be yourself a good son and a kind father, and they will be loyal. Raise the good and train the incompetent, and they will be zealous.'⁴⁸ Confucian learning, performing rituals and playing music were never intended to be merely a matter of increasing knowledge and following certain rules. Rather, whether at the personal level or in the social sphere, they were central to character cultivation, in which people would be 'stimulated by poetry, established by the rule of propriety, and perfected by music'.⁴⁹

From his theory of evil as the result of self-negligence and learning as the way to recover the original good heart, Mengzi illustrated how education came into existence and what education was about: in order to prevent people from degenerating to the level of animals (i.e. without education and disciplines), the ancient sage-king appointed a minister of education 'whose duty was to teach the people human relations: love between father and son, duty between ruler and subject, distinction between husband and

46 Lunyu, in *Confucius: The Analects (Lun yu)*, 2.19, pp. 115–6

47 Lunyu, in *Confucius: The Analects (Lun yu)*, 6.30, p. 85, and 16.13, p. 141.

48 Lunyu, in *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Leys, 2.20, p. 8.

49 Lunyu, in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan (Princeton University Press, 1963), 8.8, p. 33.

wife, precedence of the old over the young, and faith between friends'.⁵⁰ For Mengzi, good politicians were first and foremost good educators, and when compared, administrative measures were not as effective as educational practices, because 'Good government does not win the people as does good education. He who practises good government is feared by the people; he who gives the people good education is loved by them. Good government wins the wealth of the people; good education wins their hearts.'⁵¹ Since the empire has its basis in the state, the state in the family, and the family in one's own self, to win the people's hearts, there was no need for the ruler to use force or power. Being correct in one's self, a king would bring the whole empire to himself, and 'If only everyone loved his parents and treated his elders with deference, the Empire would be at peace.'⁵² In this sense Mengzi said that a humane ruler had no match in the world.

Disregarding Heaven as the spiritual source of human government, Xunzi referred to ancient sages and former kings as the source and resource of political and moral order. Like Confucius and Mengzi, Xunzi also believed moral influence was central to political administration and compared the ruler to the wellspring of the people, reasoning that if the wellspring is pure, then the outflow is pure, while if the wellspring is muddy, the outflow will be muddy.⁵³ Differing from earlier Confucians, however, Xunzi did not justify sage-kingship by the spiritual power of Heaven; rather, he derived human authority from natural and moral reality and enlisted morally superior humans (*junzi*) as responsible for enforcing moral and political codes.⁵⁴ From this realistic perspective on politics, he regarded learning (*xue*), teaching (*jiao* 教) and transforming (*hua* 化) as the most effective tools for state administration and for establishing the kingly government.

Confucianism and state administration

In its early stage, Confucian participation in government was based more on ideas and inspirations than on reality. When asked why he did not take part in government, Confucius answered by quoting from the *Book of History* that 'simply by being a good son and friendly to his brothers a man can exert an influence upon government' and confirmed that 'In so doing a man is, in fact,

50 Mengzi, in *Mencius*, 3A.4, p. 102. 51 Mengzi, in *Mencius*, 7A.14, p. 184.

52 Mengzi, in *Mencius*, 4A.11, p. 123. 53 Xunzi, 12.5, p. 385.

54 'Heaven as claimed that Heaven and Earth is the beginning of life, ritual (*li*) and righteousness (*yi*) is the beginning of order and the gentleman (virtuous person, *junzi*) is the beginning of ritual and righteousness.' Xunzi, 9.18, p. 235.

taking part in government.⁵⁵ Apart from a brief period in which he was said to serve the Duke of Lu, Confucius mostly played a role of political counselor, offering advice to the heads of different states and advocating his way of ruling by virtue. He confirmed on one occasion that if any of these rulers entrusted him with the state administration, he would first put into practice the rectification of names (*zheng ming* 正名), reasoning that if the names were not correctly defined, what people said would not fit in with their actual roles and that this would cause corruption in the ritual system and bring failure to the state administration.⁵⁶

Since Confucian solutions to the political, economic and social problems of the time were more idealistic than realistic, Confucian policies were not heeded seriously, and few of Confucius' followers in the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period were given a sufficiently high position in government for long. They had to be content with being counsellors or advisers for smaller states on matters of ritual ceremonies, administrative skills or occasionally on policy-making.

The Han dynasty provided the stage on which Confucians were for the first time given an opportunity to practise their theoretical ideas in realpolitik. Considering Legalism as the cause of failure in the Qin dynasty, Confucians advanced their vision as an alternative and won the ear/support of certain Han rulers by arguing that, to avoid the disasters of the previous dynasties and to build a Han empire that would endure, they must instal Confucian policies. This was clearly seen in Dong Zhongshu who, in synthesising earlier teachings by Confucius, Mengzi and Xunzi, produced a political strategy composed of three key elements: 'listen to Heaven', 'educate the people' and 'enforce good laws'. Among the three measures, following Heaven or Heaven's will was regarded as the divine justification of human governance, education as the most effective and efficient way for governing, and enforcing laws as concrete practice to keep the state in order: 'A real ruler sincerely listens to Heaven and follows its decree. He educates the people to complete their nature and upholds the law to maintain the social order and check the desires . . . Having carried out these three measures, the ruler will have a solid foundation for his empire.'⁵⁷

Education was the primary path for Confucians to enter government. Confucian education functioned as a way to train students as candidates for governmental posts. As described in the *History of the Western Han Dynasty*,

55 Lunyu, in *Confucius: The Analects*, 2.21, p. 66.

56 Lunyu, in *Confucius: The Analects*, 13.3, p. 118.

57 Shryock, *The Origin and Development of the State Cult of Confucius*, p. 57.

after proper training in schools 'the best students became candidates for official positions, while those of lesser ability received an honorary title'.⁵⁸ It is recorded that following the appeal by Confucian scholars, Emperor Wu established 'professorial chairs' (*bo shi* 博士) of the Five Classics in 136 BCE and founded the Grand Academy (*tai xue* 太學) in the capital in 124 BCE. The academy initially admitted fifty students under the instruction of the professorial chairs but rapidly expanded so that by the year 8 BCE the number of students was said to have increased to 3,000, the number traditionally ascribed to the students of Confucius.⁵⁹

Along with the transformation of Confucianism from a school of thought to the state ideology, the nature and function of Confucian learning also changed from cultivating good character and practising moral virtues to being the primary tool for establishing a meritocratic government. How to select the able and virtuous for administrative posts was already central to early Confucians' deliberation on good government. However, it was not until the Western Han era that they could actually influence the selection criteria and procedure, which involved 'inspection' and 'recommendation' of those who had a public reputation of being 'filial pious' and 'morally upright'.

The collapse of the Han and the ensuing long period of disunity (317–518) between the north and the south and constant wars between different states revoked or made redundant Confucian meritocracy. The Confucian selection of government officials through learning and merits was replaced by the older aristocratic system whereby governmental vacancies were filled up by sons of aristocratic families, while ordinary people were confined to lower social and military statuses and ranks. Although a half-hearted restoration of the Confucian examination system was decreed by the second emperor of the Sui (581–618), Yang Guang 楊廣 (r. 604–618), which was followed by the first emperor of the Tang (618–906), it was the second Tang emperor, Li Shimin 李士民 (r. 626–649), who installed a scholarship system to encourage learning and enhanced civil service examinations to widely recruit civil servants.⁶⁰ While the Tang civil service examinations were not exclusively based on knowledge of the Confucian classics, they did give momentum to Confucians who, acting as bureaucrats, gained access to the day-to-day administration of the state.

The Tang was at the zenith of the history of Chinese civilisation and attracted all sorts of foreigners to its capital for trade and diplomatic missions

⁵⁸ Quoted in Shryock, *The Origin and Development of the State Cult of Confucius*, p. 68.

⁵⁹ Shryock, *The Origin and Development of the State Cult of Confucius*, pp. 70–71.

⁶⁰ Cotterell, *China: A History*, p. 151.

as well as for cultural exchange and learning. Among the foreigners were a large number of Koreans and Japanese who, with great enthusiasm for the Tang, studied and carried back to their own countries not only the system of administration and Buddhism but also 'every possible element of Chinese culture'.⁶¹

Before he acceded to the throne, King Muryol of the Kingdom of Silla (365–935) in the Korean Peninsula went to Tang China in the year 648 to inspect the Chinese national university. When he became king, he sent a large number of Silla students to the Tang capital to study Confucian doctrines.⁶² A quasi-religious and military system, *hwa-rang do* (the way of the flower youth) was established based on Confucian and Buddhist teachings, members of which practised the Confucian way of learning and self-cultivation, and were instrumental in the unification of the Korean Peninsula in 669.⁶³ The penetration of Confucianism into Korean culture enabled a great Confucian scholar of the Silla period, Choi Chi-won (858–951), to say that Korean native religion was a composite of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism.⁶⁴ This laid a solid foundation for later generations. Under the influence of Neo-Confucianism, the Koryo dynasty (918–1392) established the *Kwako* (civil service examination system), and the *Kukjakam* (in Chinese *guozhi jian* 國子監, National University). During the reign of King Munjong (1047–1082), private Confucian schools (*sowon*, in Chinese *shuyuan* 書院) also flourished.

Confucian learning and scholarship also had great impact on the Japanese. Confucian ethics and politics were at least partially implemented in the formation of Japan's state administration. There is little doubt that the first Japanese constitution, *Junanô Kenpô* (Constitution of Seventeen Articles), credited to Prince Shôtoku (573–621) in 604 CE, was written under the influence of the Confucian religio-ethico-political vision, and its primary objective was to define the relations between the sovereign and the state, and between the emperor and the subjects.⁶⁵ The Prince 'accepted the Chinese [Confucian] concept of the emperor as "Son of Heaven," who was

61 Wolfram Eberhard, *A History of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 178.

62 Bak, Ki-yong, 'Historical Review of Korean Confucianism', in Yunesŭk'o Han'guk Wiwŏnhoe, *Main Currents of Korean Thought* (Arch Cape: Pace International Research, 1983), p. 256.

63 Edward Y. J. Chung, *The Korean Neo-Confucianism of Yi Toegye and Yi Yulgok* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), p. 1.

64 Jong-ho Bae, 'The "Four-Seven" Controversy in Korean Confucianism', in Chun Sin-yong (ed.), *Korean Thought* (Seoul: Si-sa-yong-o-sa publishers, 1982), p. 37.

65 Charles A. Moore (ed.), *The Japanese Mind: Essentials of Japanese Philosophy and Culture* (Honolulu: East-West Centre Press, 1967), pp. 4–9.

to rule the nation with the help of his bureaucratic officials'.⁶⁶ Emperor Tenchi (r. 662–671) established a system of education composed of national and provincial academies (*daigaku*), local and private academies and schools, in which the textbooks were mainly taken from the Confucian classics. The reign of the next few emperors and empresses witnessed the implementation of a type of Confucianism, 'an eclectic system developed during the Han period, [which] provided Japan with the first rational norm for inter-personal relationships'.⁶⁷ Although the first wave of Confucian impact on Japan soon gave way to that of Buddhism, its legacies survived and awaited a new surge of Confucian influence in the coming centuries that dramatically changed Japanese culture and state administration.

Before 900 CE Confucianism in these countries was still mostly copied from China, but thereafter Koreans and Japanese made evident efforts to adapt Confucianism to their own culture and added unique intellectual elements to the Confucian system of state administration. Confucianism in this part of East Asia was finally brought to its maturity in the period from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century when Neo-Confucianism took firm roots in Japan and Korea where the whole Confucian system, including its ethical codes, political blueprints and civil service examinations, was transplanted and then transformed. These shaped a unique culture and state administration and contributed eventually to the formation of a Confucian sphere in East Asia.

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Regional study: exchanges within the Silk Roads world system

XINRU LIU

By 1200 BCE, the Eurasian continent was roughly divided into two ecological domains: the agricultural settlements that stretched from China to the Mediterranean, and the nomadic groups who lived mostly on the northern steppe. The two eventually formed a relationship that included both mutual dependence and frequent conflicts. These north–south interactions often led to east–west migrations, as well as to trade and cultural exchanges, which ultimately resulted in the formation of a major artery of communication that historians now call the Silk Roads.

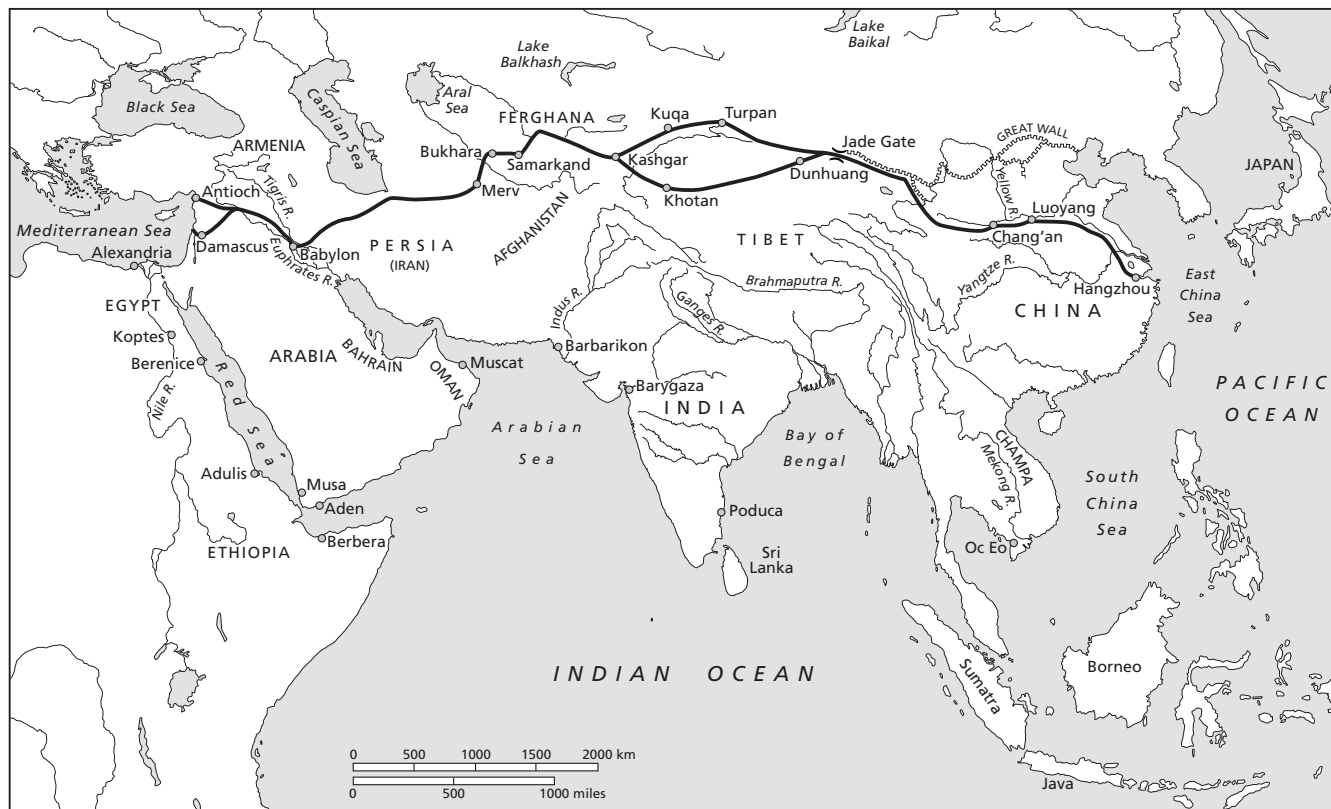
From the mid-first century BCE, states and political communities of common culture, which would eventually evolve into empires, appeared in several agricultural zones, including those under the control of the Greeks, the Achaemenid Persians, regional states in South Asia, and the Warring States in central China. Meanwhile, the horse-riding nomadic groups on the steppe started to seek allies and form large confederations to fight for pastoral resources. These nomadic peoples often surprised the sedentary peoples with their new technologies, including horse chariots and horseback riding, when invading sedentary states and empires. Nevertheless, warriors from the sedentary societies soon mastered these innovations and used them to confront their adversaries from the steppe. The two sides were not constantly at war, in large part because they were separated by almost insurmountable mountains and deserts. The Gobi Desert in Mongolia, the Tianshan and Altai mountains that separated the steppe, and the Tarim Basin which contains the Taklamakan Desert, the Kara Kum Desert between the Aral Sea and the Caspian Sea, and the Caucasus mountains between the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean all buffered the movements of the nomads, but the agricultural regions could not stop all the invasions of horse-riding nomads into the farmlands to their south.

Meanwhile, oasis settlements appeared on the edges of great deserts wherever there was snowmelt from mountains that formed seasonal rivers

or fed underground water reservoirs. Since the water supply was precious and unreliable, oases could not become prosperous agricultural settlements until sophisticated hydraulic works such as water lifting and underground channels developed. Constructing the waterworks demanded both hard labor and heavy investment, which were not available locally. The Chinese Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE) brought irrigation systems and a labor force to its western frontier, in order to garrison the Great Wall against invasions of the Xiongnu nomads and to protect its westward trade. Those efforts infused life into the oases surrounding the Taklamakan Desert and also stimulated developments in the oases between the Syr and Amu rivers. The oases around the Taklamakan were separated by large stretches of desert, which deterred the raids of horse nomads. Meanwhile, only camels, a local resource, could traverse efficiently from one oasis to another. The environment of the Aral Sea basin, a land that gained the name of Sogdiana later on, was more conducive given that both horses and camels breed well there. Numerous city-states based on agriculture appeared, but the pastoral economy remained and even became dominant whenever the climate changed to the extent that cultivation was not feasible. The trade routes passing through the oases became the principal routes of the Silk Roads, which could be depicted on a Eurasian map as no more than a few horizontal lines (see Map 17.1). More significantly, they functioned as the heart of a system of communication and transportation linking East Asia to the Mediterranean, and the Eurasian steppe to the Arabian Sea.

The Xiongnu, Han China, and the Yuezhi

In due course the conflicts between the Xiongnu on the Mongolian steppe and the Han Empire of China initiated the first organized trading networks on the Silk Roads. This started with the rise of the nomadic confederation of the Xiongnu as the supreme power on the Mongolian steppe during the late third century BCE. During the same period, the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty unified China in 221 BCE. To fend off the Xiongnu's harassments along the northern border of the empire, the First Emperor of the Qin mobilized a labor force from all over his domain, in order to build the Great Wall, or, more precisely, to have the several long walls already built by the northern states joined together into the Great Wall, which then ran all the way from the east coast of the Yellow Sea to the northern bend of the Yellow River.



Map 17.1 The Silk Roads

Meanwhile, the emperor found an ally on the steppe who was willing to trade horses to China in return for Chinese silk, thereby supplying him with the horses that he needed to defend his realm from the Xiongnu nomads north of China. The Qin Empire was thus able to acquire enough horses to protect this frontier. It was a chief named Luo from the Yuezhi tribe, a group residing in the area west of the Xiongnu, who supplied the horses for silks.¹ However, the Qin Empire fell apart soon after the First Emperor's death in 210 BCE, which led to a brief but chaotic period of civil wars during which the northern frontier was neglected in spite of the physically imposing walls that ran along mountain peaks. Even during the first few decades of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), agricultural China could not successfully defend its northern frontier.

Although the Xiongnu continued to make incursions into the frontier regions, the Great Wall stood, thus enabling the Han emperors to adopt a defensive strategy until the empire was strong enough to take the offense. By and large, the Great Wall functioned less as a defense system for China's agricultural lands than as a fence that marked a border line between the two sides, thereby facilitating a more peaceful trade and exchange of cultures and commodities. When the two sides were not at war, northern herders took their livestock and furs to the periodically opened fairs and markets that operated near the gates along the wall, where the farmers were waiting for them with wheat, millet, and silks. Soon after ascending to the throne in 140 BCE, Wudi the "Martial Emperor" (r. 140–87 BCE) decided to adopt a more aggressive strategy to deal with the Xiongnu threats. He sent several expeditions to the heart of the steppe to fight the Xiongnu in their own territory. Those military campaigns could not annihilate the Xiongnu force, nor even humiliate them, but they did push the threat away from the foothills of the Great Wall.

Emperor Wudi also thought about allying with the Yuezhi to fight the Xiongnu because the Yuezhi had had a long enduring strategic relationship, as recently as during the reign of the First Emperor of the Qin, with agricultural China. To facilitate this, in 139 BCE Wudi sent a Chinese envoy, Zhang Qian, to search out the chief of the Yuezhi, who had been forced by aggressive Xiongnu policy to migrate deep into Central Asia. After many difficult experiences including a detention by the Xiongnu for ten years, and deprived of all his companions but a servant known as Gan Fu, a native of the steppe, Zhang Qian finally arrived at the headquarters of the Yuezhi, located

1. Sima Qian, *Shi Ji* [History] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1959), 129/3260.

on the bank of the Amu River, which the Greeks had once named the Oxus. However, when the Yuezhi had arrived on the bank of the Amu River, defeated but still richly endowed, they had decided to abandon nomadic life on the steppe and become rulers of a lush agricultural land. They crossed the Amu River into Hellenistic Bactria, where they defeated other recently arrived nomads such as the Sakas/Scythians. Eventually, through both war and diplomacy, the nomadic tribes formed a new style of regime under the chief of the Kushana, which was most likely a clan of the Yuezhi confederation. This new regime combined the political structure of steppe confederations with the satrapy system of the Persian Empire.

After resuming contacts with the Yuezhi, Wudi was more interested in trading exotic goods from the “Western Region” than in making a military ally out of the Yuezhi. However, the steppe routes were simply too hazardous for commercial traffic. Wudi then launched a project to garrison the trading routes going through the oases between the Gobi Desert and the Qilian Mountains. He had the Great Wall extended all the way to the Jade Gate, a name indicating that this was where jade from Taklamakan entered China. He staffed the watchtowers and gates along the wall with soldiers and their families, and equipped the military families with agricultural resources – seeds, draft animals, and tools – in addition to weapons to fend off Xiongnu raids and garrison the Great Wall. Given that this extension of the Great Wall passed through the border land between the farming and nomadic ecological zones, raising crops there was a challenge to the soldiers and their families. The Han government thus supplied them with the tools and the knowledge of irrigation technology. Among thousands of the wooden slips, which were documents of bureaucratic records excavated from several watchtowers on the frontier, there are frequent references to the construction of a kind of irrigation system called “wells and canals” (*jingqu*).² So far no excavations have revealed the structure of the “wells and canals,” but the literary descriptions in the documents clearly demonstrate an irrigation system that brought underground water to the fields via channels, which could be above or below the ground. The hard work of the soldiers and their families could not supply enough food crops for all the frontier forces, but they nevertheless brought agricultural life and technology into this area. Around 100 BCE, Wudi sent orders to expand the military-agricultural colonies outside the Jade Gate, by which he meant the oases on the edges of the Taklamakan Desert.

2 Chen Zhi, *Juyan Hanjian Yanjiu* [Study of Documents on Wooden Slips from Juyan Gate] (Tianjin: Gujichubanshe, 1986).

Though the Han suzerainty over the “Western Regions” expanded and contracted during the following three centuries, its agricultural technology and culture remained and thus enabled the oases to grow into viable way stations and depots for the Silk Roads trade.

While the Han Empire was busy maintaining its hegemony over the Western Regions in order to bring more horses, jade, and goods such as corals and glassware from further west into the Chinese court and the homes of its courtiers, the Kushans in Bactria were transforming themselves into rulers of a large commercial and agricultural society. Around the mid-first century CE, they crossed the Hindu-Kush mountains into India, and soon became the supreme power in South and Central Asia, and thereby the most strategic facilitator of the Silk Roads trade from China to the Mediterranean. By the first century CE, the Kushan Empire was attracting not only traders but also religious preachers. Buddhists, Jains, and Hindus from India and Zoroastrians from Iran flooded into Kushan territory to seek patronage. Buddhist monuments were particularly conspicuous in this landscape. Indeed, Buddhism then went through theological and institutional transformation under Kushan hegemony. The new Mahayana doctrine of Buddhism worshipped a divine Buddha and numerous semi-divine bodhisattvas, deviating from the almost atheist teaching of the Buddha during his lifetime in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. Prior to the development of the Mahayana doctrine, Buddhist monks had survived begging for their daily food. After the emergence of the Mahayana doctrine, the monks settled in richly endowed monasteries. As traders and rulers vying to make donations to the Buddha and bodhisattvas, monasteries amassed wealth that funded the numerous stupas and images of Buddhist deities, an artistic legacy that is now known as Gandharan Buddhist art.

The Kushan Empire, embracing a territory across Central Asia and north India, hosted a highly cosmopolitan urban culture. The merchants came from all directions, spoke various languages, and were determined not only to trade but also to make donations to Buddhist, Zoroastrian, and Hindu temples. On the west coast of India, China’s silk textiles, fancy and plain, reached seaports at the delta of the Indus and the Gulf of Cambay. There the Roman traders would pick up this cargo and trade their goods for gold and silver coins. They also brought wine, coral, frankincense, and myrrh to these ports. The Kushan Empire thus linked the Silk Roads to the Mediterranean market through the Arabian Sea. In addition, goods passing through Kushan territory were also transported on the westward land routes to the Mediterranean via the Iranian Plateau.

Sogdiana and Ferghana

Between the Han imperial presence in the eastern section of Central Asia and the Kushan dominance in Bactria and India, oasis city-states spread on the land between the Syr and Amu rivers, a region known as Sogdiana. There was also a stretch of fertile agricultural land as well as pastures in the Ferghana Valley, which was ruled by a kingdom called Dayuan. Both horses and camels thrived in the region, and so did the grapes and the wine.

In the second century BCE when Han envoy Zhang Qian passed through the Ferghana Valley, he reported seeing about seventy walled cities, both big and small, surrounded by farmlands producing wheat and rice, vineyards harvesting grapes which were fermented into the best wine, and lands growing alfalfa which nurtured the most beautiful and speedy horses.³ The king of Dayuan commanded a military force of 6,000 soldiers, and was surrounded by a group of aristocrats. They could enthrone or dethrone the king if he was facing difficult political decisions. One of these occasions was a conflict with the Han, which was determined to acquire some of Dayuan's famous horses. Wudi of the Han sent an envoy to trade for the horses, but the king of Dayuan declined. When the Han troops, headed by General Li Guangli, besieged the capital city, the aristocrats decided it was in the best interest of the country to kill the king, surround the city, and give the horses to the Han general.⁴ Though the fame of Dayuan's horses had invited this disastrous invasion from the Han Empire, the distance between Ferghana and China was nevertheless too great to allow the Han Empire to exert any real control. Soon after the Han troops departed, the local aristocrats killed the king enthroned by the Han general and replaced him with their own favorite king. Although disgusted by this betrayal, Wudi could not afford another military expedition and thus had no choice but to keep sending gifts hoping for goodwill and a commercial relationship. This encounter thawed Wudi's ambition to extend China's imperial influence westward beyond the Pamir Plateau. Nevertheless, he still sought its products, not only the "heavenly horses" but also the best fodder, alfalfa, and grapes.

To the west of Dayuan, the city-states in Sogdiana never formed a unified polity but nevertheless nurtured a multicultural environment at the cross-road of the north and south, west and east trade routes. As city-states sprouted in river valleys and oases between deserts, camels became more common than in the Ferghana Valley. Bordered between the truly

³ Qian, *Shi Ji*, 123/3160.

⁴ Ban Gu, *Han Shu* [History of the Han] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1962), 96a/3895.

agricultural ecology in India and the deserts and steppes to the north, Sogdiana was often the target of looting horse nomads who, from time to time, decided to stay put and become farmers and traders. Actually, most residents of the walled cities in Sogdiana behaved much like the Yuezhi warriors did during the Han times, eventually embracing sedentary life. Whatever their ethnic or cultural background, citizens in Sogdiana adopted a somewhat uniform language called Sogdian, a language affiliated with ancient Persian. At the knot of the Silk Roads traffic, they welcomed travelers from all religions. Judging from their own funeral practices, they appear to have been more Zoroastrian than anything else. Though frequently at war with each other, the city-states in Sogdiana nevertheless formed a commonwealth of culture and a uniquely Sogdian identity.

The Sogdians were often farmers in their homeland, but many also took up the profession of trader, traveling to China, India, Persia, the steppe, and even the Mediterranean region. They also were quick to pick up foreign cultures and languages used in the lands they traded with. Indeed, they were among the first group of missionaries who brought Buddhism from India to China in the early centuries of the Common Era. On boulders lining the cliffs along the treacherous roads on the upper Indus, Sogdian traders sketched their names and inscribed their devotion to Buddhism. They also served as agents for nomads who obtained silks from China but did not have the skills necessary to sell them for profit. Donning their colorful, glittering silk robes, Sogdian traders traveled to all corners of the Silk Roads system and established their own networks connecting their diasporas in China, the Taklamakan oases, and in South and West Asia.

Persian silk, a commodity that rivaled Chinese silk in the Eurasian market

Some time around the third century BCE, a people known as the Arsacids established what is now known as the Parthian Empire on the Iranian Plateau. Like the Kushans, they were originally from the steppe, but unlike the Kushans, they would eventually begin to manufacture silk cloth and develop a market for it as far east as Central Asia and as far west as the shores of the eastern Mediterranean. Prior to the invasion of Alexander the Macedonian in the late fourth century BCE, many of the Arsacids had already become Zoroastrians, but during the occupation of the Greek armies in Asia, it had been to their advantage for the Parthians to accept the Greek gods. However, Greek power did not last forever. Sometime around 64 BCE the

Parthians defeated a Greek army and forced it out of Iran. Thereafter, many of the Parthians rejected the Greek religion and favored the restoration of Zoroastrianism.

During the first century CE, with Parthian power fully established in Iran, they encountered the easterly expansion of the Roman Empire into Syria and Mesopotamia. Although both powers did make military incursions into territories of the other side, they also managed to maintain commercial contacts through intermediaries, mostly Greek-speaking Arabs. Given the hostilities of the two rivals, as well as their desire to trade, a series of independent caravan cities was able to prosper in the deserts in Syria and Jordan. As the fame of Chinese silks started to reach the wealthy Roman towns, the merchants in Parthia were eager to make profit in the trade, and they clearly did not want to see a direct commercial contact between the Han Empire and the Romans. When in 97 CE Gan Ying, an official Chinese envoy sent to establish contact with the Roman Empire, reached a port city called Tiaozhi, probably a Chinese rendering of Antioch, he returned home instead of sailing on to Rome. Sailors there apparently scared him off with stories of the dangers on the sea, but it was more likely Parthians merchants who prevented him from reaching the Roman Empire.

The Parthians claimed that they were reviving ancient Persian tradition and Zoroastrian religion, but they inherited a culture imbued with Hellenistic tradition and also brought in their own steppe culture. The Iranian Plateau was never the most fertile agricultural land. The Persian Empire and the Seleucids had always relied on their Mesopotamia possession for the supply of food grains. But its rich pastoral resources and intimate contacts with the steppes supplied a flourishing woolen textile industry. Artisans in Persia probably soon learned how to produce silk textiles with yarns from China, using technology of woolen textiles. Technically, this meant that Persian artisans invented a way to produce silk textiles in a style characteristically Persian. After the Eastern Roman Empire evolved into the Byzantine Empire and when the silk industry was becoming a government monopoly during the reign of Justinian (483–565 CE), numbers of disgruntled silk weavers escaped the oppression by crossing the border into the Sassanid domain.⁵ Thereafter the weaving technique from the Mediterranean textile tradition further enriched Persian silk textiles. Meanwhile, China remained the only country at that time that could produce the silk yarn of long filament, which

5 Procopius, *The Anecdota or Secret History*, trans. H. B. Dewing (Cambridge, MA: The Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1928), ch. xxv, 22–25.

resulted in strong, fine, and shiny strings for delicate textiles. Silk yarn from China provided materials for Persian artisans making silk textiles even more beautiful than their woolen tapestry.

During the Sassanid period (c. 224 – c. 640 CE), the fame of Persian silk textiles reached as far east as China and as far west as the Mediterranean. Under royal patronage, its weavers developed a repertoire of motifs from legends in the Zoroastrian religious tradition and Persian imperial postures. They emulated the animal and human figures in a majestic Persian royal style, and then surrounded them with decorative patterns borrowed from China, Central Asia, and the Romans. The Simurgh, the mysterious creature with a mammal's head on a bird body in various Zoroastrian stories, was the most popular motif on Persian silk brocade and also other artworks such as silver vases and plates. The pattern of two horses confronting each other and the more sophisticated scene of two horse riders confronting each other were both derived from the scene of Ahura Mazda granting investiture to the founder of the Sassanid Empire Ardashir I (r. 224–241 CE) at Naqshi-I Rostam, Iran. The king and the god face each other on horses, while the god hands a diadem to the king to certify the divinity of the kingship. By the period of the Chinese Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE) Persian silks sold so well in China that some Chinese weaving shops actually specialized in making Persian silk brocade. Persian-style silk brocade also made such a profit all along the Silk Roads system that Central Asian oases also began to use patterns including motifs of Simurghs, lions, rams, and other Persian symbols. Zandan, a weaver settlement within the Bukhara oasis, produced a silk brocade similar to the Persian style which became so popular for centuries that remnants of it have been found all the way from Dunhuang in western China to the churches in Western Europe. Regrettably, no such archival records regarding silk production, nor samples of Persian silks, have survived in Sassanian territory to be examined. Nevertheless, the same patterns of Simurghs and ducks on silk textiles, which are known to be Persian, also appear on the royal robes sculptured on the cliff in Tak-I Bustan in what was Persia. The characteristic Persian motifs on Persian silks, vases, and plates thus set the ascetic standard for artistic products traded along the Silk Roads.

The emergence of a market for silk in the Mediterranean

The Mediterranean became the chief market for Chinese silk and the Silk Roads trade in general after the Roman imperial structure created a strong

demand for luxury goods from the east. When Alexander had marched to Central Asia and India in the fourth century BCE, his purpose was not to obtain silks from China. At that time, the Greeks were not yet aware of the shiny and glittering textiles; furthermore, the Yuezhi nomads had not yet carried the silk trade to Bactria and Sogdiana where the Greek army was encamped.

After Rome rose as the superpower in the Mediterranean and transformed itself from a republic to an empire, a ruling elite with a taste for luxuries formed. Roman senators, for example, distinguished themselves with robes dyed in purple, an expensive dye extracted from a particular species of shellfish found along a coastal area of the Levant.⁶ Elite Roman women, however, developed a fashion of wearing lightweight, semi-translucent silk crepe.⁷ Though this type of silk textile uses less material than the heaviest types such as brocade and tapestry, it demands a long filament of yarn from a whole cocoon. During the first two centuries CE, when Roman imperial power reached its apex and created a demand for luxuries, sericulture and filature (a technique that extracts long filaments from cocoons) remained a Chinese specialty. Thus, the Romans had to import this kind of silk textile from China. Meanwhile, as noted above, the Persians were developing their own silk-weaving technology from their own experience in weaving woolen textiles in order to produce wide pieces of brocade and tapestry. In addition, the Persians also learned to unravel plain silk rolls from China for their own purpose. Levant cities such as Tire, Gaza, and Beirut also started silk-weaving industries in order to make heavier types of silk textiles. Both the light type of silk textile and the silk materials for making heavier types of silks relied on the supply from China. The Persians, with their own silk-weaving industry busy, were not the best suppliers of silk materials to the Roman market. Because of this, Roman merchants had to continue their commercial contact with the Kushans who had always been a good source for acquiring Chinese silks.

In addition, a Greek-speaking merchant community set out from the Red Sea to seek silk and other oriental luxuries for rich Romans. Merchants from Hellenistic Egypt had long ventured out of the Red Sea to reach ports along the western coast of India. With the market in the Mediterranean expanding, from the middle or later first century CE, the merchants sailed to India annually, riding the southeast trade monsoon on the Arabian Sea from April to October, and returning on the northwest monsoon that blew from October to April. An anonymous Greek pilot and trader compiled a manual,

6 Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), vols. III and IX, ch. LX, 125–28, p. 249.

7 Pliny, *Natural History*, vol. II, ch. XX, 53, p. 379.

known as the *Voyage Around the Red Sea* (*Periplus Maris Erythraei*), in Greek, which provided information for the voyage as well as the resources that were available for trade in the major ports from the Red Sea to the mouth of the Indus, and all the way down the southeast coast of the Indian peninsula. In Barbarikon on the mouth of the Indus and Barygaza on the Gulf of Cambay, the Greco-Roman traders unloaded their cargo of Mediterranean products such as wine and coral, as well as commodities they purchased along the way, such as frankincense and myrrh from the southern Arabian Peninsula, to purchase silks from China, fragrances from the Himalayas, lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, and local products such as indigo, a blue dye for cotton textiles. The Roman merchants often did not have enough goods to trade for all the things they wanted, so they paid for them with large numbers of gold and silver coins. In their search for tropical spices, the Roman sailors explored many ports along the coast of India. They stopped at a port called Poduca, near the modern city of Pondicherry on the eastern coast of the Indian peninsula, where they encountered many different ships sailing on the Bay of Bengal. Although Roman traders paid local merchants with Roman coins, both gold and silver, the local people apparently buried this treasure, rather than use it in their trade. This suggests that this part of southern India was not extensively involved in the commercial system of the Silk Roads. Meanwhile, on Indian's western coast, important ports such as Barbarikon and Barygaza thrived and east-west commercial exchanges developed rapidly.

Around the same time that Roman ships started to frequent the ports of India, that is, around the late first century BCE, the Kushans crossed the Hindu-Kush mountains and assumed the role of the broker in the Silk Roads trade. Cargos arriving at Barbarikon were sent up the river to the residences of kings. In the metropolitan area of the Kushan Empire, that is, the former Hellenistic settlements in Bactria and northwest India, the Greek language not only had survived the frequent changes of regimes since the departure of Alexander but also had sustained Greek culture among their rulers and local communities. As a result, traders dealing with goods from the Silk Roads encountered Roman traders who also spoke Greek. Roman traders also noticed that in Barygaza even Greek coins were still in circulation. Meanwhile the Kushans were casting coins with Greek legends, even though the weight followed the Roman standard. It is also possible that the Kushans simply re-cast the Roman coins with a Kushan king's image on it and a legend that used the Greek alphabet. Thus, the Roman traders were visiting the ports with a familiar commercial environment where the monetary system was recognizable and the coins apparently deemed trustworthy.

Roman traders did not give up on commerce across the land routes of West Asia, even though the empire was frequently at war with the Parthians. They obtained silks, fragrances, and spices through caravan cities such as Petra in the rock valley of Jordan and Palmyra in the Syrian Desert. The caravan cities in this region had a similar history to the oasis cities in Bactria – they had also started out as Greek garrison towns after Alexander’s expedition. All of these cities shared Greek architectural features, including the layout of a typical Greek polis. However, since they had no agricultural base such as the Hellenistic cities in Bactria, their survival and prosperity depended totally on trade. Indeed, the trade from the Silk Roads brought great fortune for them. Palmyra, for example, had sufficient wealth to build a marble urban center and a marble necropolis in the desert. Palmyrans not only hosted travelers and collected tariffs from caravans passing through their city but also sent out traders to both the Parthian and the Roman inlands to set up trading depots called *funduq*. Their good fortune nevertheless brought an end to the city. Palmyra expanded from a city-state under Roman suzerainty into a trading empire that started to encroach on Roman territory. Their ambitions were duly met with a crushing suppression that finished off the city in 274. The tragic end of Palmyra, however, merely anticipated the demise of the caravan trade in this region. As the Roman Empire’s fortune plummeted in the following decades, the market for their luxuries also dwindled. Caravan cities serving the Roman Empire could not have survived much longer.

Monasteries and travelers

Oasis cities in Central Asia, both those that fringed the Taklamakan Desert and the settlements in Sogdiana, continued to thrive in spite of the demise of the Han, Roman, Parthian, and Kushan empires. Although surrounded by deserts, the underground water and seasonal streams could be tapped for agriculture. Since the beginning of the first century BCE, residents there had been developing irrigation systems supported either by Han imperial power, or by the investments made possible by the profits from the trade itself. The oasis settlements thus built a self-sustaining agricultural base that enabled them to survive the demise of their imperial patrons. Nevertheless, their prosperity still depended upon the commercial activities on the Silk Roads. Fortunately for the merchants, from the second century CE, a new form of patronage for the trade arrived with the spread of Buddhism to Central Asia and China. Buddhist ideology and institutions became key players in the market system of the early Silk Roads. Buddhist religious institutions were

not the only ones active in oasis settlements along the Silk Roads, since Zoroastrian and later on Manichaean followers could be found on these roads. Nevertheless, Buddhist institutions had the strongest presence there, given that they established monasteries in all the major way stations and had huge statues sculptured on major landmarks.

Buddhism flourished because it had transformed itself from an Indian religion to a universal religious system under the Kushan regime. Mahayana Buddhist teachings created a set of deified Buddhas and many semi-divine bodhisattvas for worshippers who could not grasp the subtleties of the philosophy of the Buddha but were willing to seek the grace of the gods. Thus, it was Gandharan Buddhist art that provided the models for making idols for its worshippers. Mahayana theology also endorsed a commercial ethos that encouraged worshippers to make donations to the Buddha and bodhisattvas, donations that were administered by monasteries. In exchange for these donations, the donors would acquire religious merits that would protect them in the hazardous career of trade and promote their status in their afterlives. Mahayana Buddhist texts such as the *Lotus Sutra* or the *Western Pure Land Sutra* promote certain commodities in the Silk Roads trade as sacred goods for worshipping, such as silks and the *sapta ratna*, or the Seven Treasures, including gold, silver, lapis lazuli, coral, pearls, etc. In this way, Buddhist institutions won the patronage of traders, and in turn the traders benefited from their hospitality.

Before long Buddhist institutions were providing the infrastructure on the trade routes in Central Asia. By the fourth century CE, Buddhist monuments had appeared at all stops of the Silk Roads. Two gigantic statues of the Buddha were carved on the cliffs of the Bamiyan Valley, a lush stretch of land southeast of the formidable Hindu-Kush mountains that marked the Indian gate to the Silk Roads. At the other end of the journey in north China, the huge sitting Buddhas at Yungang, a city located on a foothill of the Great Wall, marked the eastern gate of the Silk Roads. Where there were mountains, Buddhist monks excavated caves in their foothills, and when there were no mountains nearby, they developed oasis settlements or built stupas and monastery enclaves. In the eastern section of the Silk Roads system, Buddhist monks excavated caves on hills near Dunhuang, an oasis inside the Jade Gate, where they hosted travelers and immigrants from Central Asia and India. Outside the Jade Gate, the Shanshan culture developed in the third century and united a number of walled cities on the eastern part of Tarim Basin, thus forming a confederation where numerous Buddhist institutions dotted the landscape. To the north of the Shanshan domain, the Turfan Basin also

became a center of Buddhist culture receiving visitors from both the steppe from the northern foothills of the Altai mountain range as well as traders from inside China's Great Wall.

In the western section of the Tarim Basin, the oasis city-state of Khotan developed on the southern edge of the Taklamakan Desert, and connected this area with India through Kashmir and the upper Indus routes. Oasis cities there formed a confederation under Khotan, an oasis famous for its jade ever since the second millennium BCE. From the second century CE, local authorities began to issue copper coins with a Chinese legend on one side and Kharoshthi script of the local language on the other. The Khotanese also learned sericulture from China and Buddhism from India. The oases around Khotan built many monasteries that often functioned as local civic centers dealing with daily transactions and disputes. On the northern edge of the Taklamakan Desert and south to the Tianshan range, the town of Kucha exerted cultural influence on the small oases to its east and west. Kucha most likely received its Buddhist culture via the routes of Sogdiana, given that the wall paintings in its cave temples near Kucha were similar in style to those found in Sogdiana. In Sogdiana, the homeland of the Sogdian traders, urban residents were more Zoroastrian than Buddhist. Nevertheless, Buddhist monasteries were built to accommodate travelers of the Buddhist faith.

Sogdian traders and immigrants did carry their Zoroastrian faith on their diasporas along the Silk Roads and inside China. Burials of Sogdian merchants in China, dated to the sixth century, testify that many of them were faithful followers of Zoroastrian teaching. However, they were not interested in converting others to their faith and rather rode on the waves of Buddhist propagation in order to carry out their business with the Chinese and the Indians. In later centuries, some of the Sogdians did become carriers of Manichaeism, a religion founded by Mani (c. 216–277) in Iran. This religion was viewed in the Mediterranean region as a heresy of Christianity, and in Central Asia and China as a mutation of Buddhism. Its followers often adopted Buddhist iconography for worship. Indeed, wall paintings in Manichaean cave temples among the Buddhist caves in the Bezblik grottos near Turfan are so similar to Buddhist ones that only keen observers can distinguish them. At least one true Christian “heretic” sect, the Nestorians, did come to China via the Central Asian Silk Roads not long after the Byzantine authorities denounced and exiled Nestor in the early fifth century, but it did not show its face in China until the early seventh century. Nestorian missionaries had some success in Tang China, but left little trace on the Central Asian trade routes. All these religions from foreign lands brought

their culture with them into Tang China, yet none of them could compete with Buddhism and its impact on the minds and pockets of the Chinese people.

Late in the fourth century CE, a boom in Buddhist construction along the Silk Roads took off due to the arrival of a new wave of steppe nomads invading agricultural lands. In China, the Toba clan of the Xianbei tribe unified numerous tribes who poured over the Great Wall and stayed there to establish a Chinese regime, the Northern Wei, by the early fifth century. At the other end of the Silk Roads, the Hephthalites, or Huna as the Indians called them, occupied Sogdiana in the late fourth century and invaded Tukharistan (former Bactria) in the early fifth century, and then skirmished with the Sassanids and made incursions into India, but never established a stable regime in the region. These newcomers from the steppe, like their predecessors such as the Yuezhi or the Scythians, patronized the cultures of the sedentary people. The Buddhist monuments that sprang up under their hegemony were the best testimony to this development. They might be savage during military actions, but religious institutions served as a bridge, connecting them to the sedentary communities. Thus, the patronizing of local religion became an efficient means to exploit the conquered lands and peoples. Buddhist connections in particular could then maintain the flow of trade, even without imperial protection.

The Byzantine Empire and the Tang Empire

From the sixth century to the ninth century, as the Byzantine Empire and then the Tang Empire became the dominant cultural powers of Eurasia, both sought to control the Silk Roads economic and cultural systems. Both empires created their own silk cultures that served their social as well as political hierarchies. In order to get rid of the remnants of the Roman republican tradition, Byzantine emperors tried to build their authority on a unified Christian church with a clear and strict ecclesiastical hierarchy. Emperor Justinian I (r. 527–65) was the most important figure in the establishment of an authoritarian regime. He was famous for compiling the code of Roman law, but he also abolished the classical Greek school of teaching in the empire. He had Hagia Sophia, the largest and most splendid basilica of the time, built to demonstrate his devotion and his patronage of the Christian church. Above one of the vestibules of the basilica, there is a mosaic showing Emperor Justinian holding the basilica and Emperor Constantine holding a model of the city of Constantinople toward the Virgin Mary who is holding

the baby Jesus. All four figures wear halos. The Virgin Mary is draped in a dark purple robe from head to toe, and both emperors wear partial purple robes, presumably all made of silk textiles dyed in purple. Justinian thus established the rule that purple silk was the status symbol for both royalty and Christian divinity.

The Tang Empire (618–907) in China unified the states built by nomads in the north, as well as those in the south where northern Chinese immigrants had fled from the nomads in the previous centuries. The Tang Empire thus ruled over a large territory populated by diverse ethnicities. Thereafter, it revived its ambition to expand into the Western Region, which brought in more goods from the Silk Roads and also more kinds of visitors and immigrants. In order to cope with these divisive forces of conquered kings and princes, the Tang emperors established a centralized bureaucratic system that covered the entire country. Officials were now recruited into the bureaucratic hierarchy through nationwide examinations on a variety of subjects. In this system, different colored and differently designed official robes marked the levels in the hierarchy. Empress Wu Zetian (r. 650–705), the only female sovereign in Chinese history, made the decisive step to build the bureaucratic system based on merit but not on blood. Incidentally, purple was the color for the highest level of officials, but it did not reach the status of the royal symbol. Empress Wu favored Buddhism most among the many religions in Tang China, although Buddhism never became the state religion but rather flourished on its own terms. Tang rulers still patronized all religions in their land, foreign or indigenous. They also showed their patronage by granting silk robes to prestigious priests and teachers, and purple robes were considered the most prestigious ones.

Both the Byzantine Empire and the Tang Empire tried to have the purple silk and other silk textiles for official use be produced in state-controlled workshops, and they tried to ban the sales of these silks in the markets. Their efforts to monopolize the silk trade did restrict, to a certain extent, the free transaction of textiles within the Silk Roads economic system. The monopoly, however, could not be sealed tight. Once purple silk became the symbol of high status, people who had means but not the other qualifications to obtain purple silk always tried every means possible to reach it, even risking harsh punishment. Those who appreciated the beauty of silk textiles, more than the status associated with the forbidden types, could resort to silks of other colors and designs. Since the Silk Roads system delivered a great variety of designs and techniques of weaving and dyeing to many lands, many new products appeared in the markets. Indeed, the Persian silk, or silk in Persian

style, produced under the Sassanids, became the most popular commodity in the silk market of China, Central Asia, and, via the Byzantine markets, all the way to the markets of Western Europe.

The aspiration of becoming the leader of Christendom prompted Byzantium to distribute purple and other high-end silk textiles to Eastern and Western Europe. After the reign of Justinian I, Byzantine territory shrank continuously, yet the empire still possessed the most prestigious material culture in the entire Christian world. To protect itself from the envy and aggression coming from many directions, the Byzantine emperors used silk textiles, especially the purple ones, as diplomatic weapons. The grandeur of Hagia Sophia and the splendor of its silk decorations convinced representatives from the Slavic countries in Eastern Europe that Constantinople owned a heaven on earth so grand that they should join the Orthodox Church. In Western Europe, Byzantium faced the rivalry of the Papacy in Rome for the leadership of western Christendom. Though the Byzantines lost the competition, their ecclesiastic regalia made in Byzantine workshops, and the liturgy performed in Byzantine basilicas, held the standard for Western Europe for many centuries. Hence, the market for Byzantine silks in Western European churches always kept the purple and embroidered silks flowing westward out of the Byzantine Empire.

The Tang Empire allowed Buddhism to develop its institutions and estates, and it also lavished votive gifts on these institutions, including all kinds of silk textiles and robes for monks and monasteries. Zoroastrian, Manichaean, and Nestorian Christian institutions also flourished in this cosmopolitan environment and received patronage from the imperial authority. Buddhism was nevertheless the religion that transformed the eschatology of the Chinese people. The Chinese, rulers and the ruled, believed that their lives after the current one would depend on the merits they had earned in this and former lives, and that giving to Buddhist monasteries would improve their chance of being reborn into a better existence, and could even protect their lives in this world. The court thus gave many pieces of silk, including the forbidden ones, either newly manufactured or previously worn by living or deceased royal members, to the Buddhist monasteries hoping that these gifts would bring them blessings in their afterlife. The monks, nevertheless, were not allowed to wear these bright-colored silk clothes but had to sell them in order to raise money. By the ninth century, so many types of silk textiles, including those reserved for royalty, were available in the marketplaces that these governmental restrictions became meaningless. When the Tang Empire collapsed at the end of the ninth century, the government monopoly totally

diminished. Silk brocade, tapestry, and crepe all became unrestricted and affordable commodities for an urban society with means in China.

Islam transformed the Silk Roads system

Constantinople adhered to its most prestigious product, purple silk, to the end of its regime in the fifteenth century, but its monopoly suffered once the Silk Roads system spread its influence throughout Afro-Eurasia. The Islamic religion, with its commercial ethos and financial structure, together with the Jewish trading communities, ignored the restrictions enforced by the Byzantines and Tang China, and thereby heralded a new age of commerce. After conquering Egypt, the Umayyad Caliphate first imitated Byzantine coins and then invented what became the standard Islamic coinage under Caliph Abdal Malik (r. 685–705).⁸ The Islamic doctrine, though, does not endorse money lending, which is essential for gathering capital for trade. The Muslims, however, got around this rule with a traditional financial tool practiced among Arabs, the *commenda*-type partnership. In this partnership, the capital provider and the agent share both the profit and the risk. For example, Muhammad the Prophet worked as an agent of trade for Khadija, a widow who provided the capital and later became his wife and follower. At least during the first century of Islamic expansion, the Umayyad caliphs seem to have been more interested in exploiting the resources of the conquered lands and peoples and facilitating their own trade than in converting people to their religion.

Nevertheless, such successful conquests brought windfalls of wealth into the caliphate, as well as tensions between the guardians of religious values and the military commanders and soldiers who were overwhelmed by the booty from the battlefields and the luxuries of the conquered rulers in Egypt, Iran, and Central Asia. In their dilemma between following religious discipline and living a frugal life or enjoying their abundant booty from the conquests, the caliphs created the *tiraz* system that regulated and branded textile production. *Tiraz* was the Persian word for embroidery, and the *tiraz* system that they created stated that all the textiles produced in the caliphate should carry a stripe of inscriptions executed with silk thread, giving the place and administration of its manufacture, in addition to the phrase “there is no god than the god alone.” According to the learned Muslim scholars of the *Hadith* (the sayings of Muhammad the Prophet), a robe made entirely of silk

8 Clive Foss, *Arab-Byzantine Coins* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2008), pp. 58–83.

could be too extravagant for a faithful Muslim to get into heaven, but cotton or linen clothes with a band of silk embroidery or tapestry as a decoration were acceptable. Meanwhile, the information on the silk inscriptions served as the brand of the textile and verified its quality and origin. In addition, textiles decorated with a *tiraz* band were beautiful and affordable, and thus they were traded throughout the Silk Roads system, and were especially welcomed by Western European Christians who had a hard time getting completely purple silk textiles from the Byzantines.

With all its advanced financial tools, Islam changed the face of the Silk Roads after its conquest of Central Asia in the first half of the eighth century. Umayyad generals conquered Tukharistan (formerly known as Bactria) and Sogdiana with both military might and diplomacy. Arab military forces in Central Asia dealt not only with the farmers and traders but also with another wave of nomadic migration by Turkic-speaking tribes. The Turks from the steppe had already settled around Tukharistan and Sogdiana and therefore joined the oasis states to fight the Muslims. In the following centuries, the people in this area – nomads, farmers, and traders – cautiously and tentatively accepted their new rulers and the new religion with their own economic welfare in mind. Eventually, most of them converted to Islam. Thus mosques, Islamic tombs, and caravanserais, all sponsored by Turkish Islamic rulers, began to replace the Buddhist monasteries on the landscape of the Silk Roads. The eastward march of the Arab army finally stopped at the Talas River, which flows between present-day Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. It was there that the Arab army defeated an army of the Tang Empire in 751. Though the Islamic military did not stay to conquer the easternmost section of Central Asia, its residents in the oases and on the steppe converted to Islam in the following centuries. Buddhist cave temples gradually faded into the landscape, but remnants of their culture still linger.

This Arab army in Central Asia took some 20,000 prisoners away from the battle of Talas, including scholars and artisans from many walks of life, both Central Asian and Chinese.⁹ They thus arrived at the center of the Islamic

9 This event was recorded in various Chinese sources, including Du Huan, *Jingxing Ji* [Travelogue], ed. Zhang Yichun (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2000), pp. 41–43; Liu Xu, *Jiu Tang Shu* [Old History of the Tang Dynasty] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1975), 109/3298. The number of captives taken by the Arabs is based on the size of the army commanded by Gao Xianzhi, varying from 20,000 to 30,000 according to different sources, as Gao lost most of his soldiers at the battle. Gao was famous for recruiting his army from cities (Xu, *Jiu Tang Shu*, 105/3216), and Du Huan, a nephew of Du You, historian and a prime minister of the Tang court, was among the prisoners who were taken by the Arabs. Therefore the prisoners could have included many artisans and other talented people.

empire in the decade just after the “Abbasid Revolution” had taken over the caliphate from the Umayyad line and built a new capital at Baghdad. These talented prisoners thus participated in the construction of the new caliphate. Under the Abbasid Caliphate, the smartest traders and some of the best brains in Central Asia then embraced Islam and therefore contributed to religious, intellectual, and commercial developments in the Islamic world. In particular, in the late eighth century, the Barmak family, one great patron lineage of Buddhism from the city of Balkh (Greek Bactra), moved to Baghdad to serve the caliphate as viziers, or chief ministers, for half a century. They were most likely responsible for the introduction of paper-making and the establishment of a bureaucratic system for the Islamic empire. The Barmakids also took an interest in collecting books written in Greek, Persian, and Sanskrit languages and had these scholarly and literary works translated into Arabic. This Central Asian family finally lost its elevated position in Baghdad politics and met a tragic end. However, there is no doubt that for a long time they contributed to the economic and intellectual prosperity under Caliph Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809), who was deemed to be the greatest of the caliphs in the stories of the *One Thousand and One Nights*. Baghdad intellectual life attracted another Central Asian, Muhammad Ibn Musa al-Khwarismi (fl. c. 825), whose career left a considerable legacy to the world. His name shows that he was from Khwarizm, one of the city-states in Sogdiana. He then translated the Indian decimal system (which included a zero) into the “Arabic numerals” as we now know them today. In a way, he thus laid the foundation of modern mathematics, as shown by our term “algorithm,” which is derived from his name al-Khwarismi.

The Silk Roads was a network of trade routes that crisscrossed the Eurasian continent, but the concept of the Silk Roads also encompasses a much larger historical process than trade. It became a world system where farmers and herders fought with each other and also learned from each other; and where sincere and less sincere followers of Buddhism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Islam from a great many lands met to trade and talk with each other. The various participants in the system formed not only a commercial network but also a cultural domain where the ascetic values of commodities evolved, spread, mutated, and sometimes dissolved to make way for new types of “cultural” goods. Even highly devoted people changed their religious faiths when the situation in their world changed. Eventually the Silk Roads system dwindled and all but disappeared after the land routes no longer could compete with the volume of commerce during the subsequent “Age of Maritime Trade.”

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South Asia

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South Asia is a term that corresponds broadly to the Indian subcontinent, covering the modern nation-states of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. With an area in excess of 4.5 million km², this is a region that encompasses a tremendous diversity of topography, climate, and ecology, and therefore considerably uneven historical trajectories. To hope to capture all or even most of those trajectories – the divergent yet interacting histories of subregions – over a span of time from 1200 BCE to 900 CE that saw changes of a fundamental and complex order, would be an ambition that far exceeds the scope of a chapter. This chapter therefore seeks merely to outline phases and developments conventionally regarded as mainstream in the foundation of civilization in mainland South Asia.

That story of the foundation of civilization¹ is usually traced to the banks of two mighty South Asian rivers, initially the Indus and for the most part the Ganga that, starting in the upper reaches of the western Himalayas, charts a vast and highly fertile flood plain all the way to the Bay of Bengal in the east. It is along the multiple tributaries of the Indus (*Saptasindhavah* = seven rivers) in modern-day Punjab that one of the most ancient texts of the world, the Sanskrit *Rig Veda Samhita*, a collection of hymns and invocations, seems to have been composed at a date that is usually but conservatively put at c. 1500 BCE.² This text constitutes only the oldest stratum of a massive corpus

1 Civilization came to South Asia, strictly speaking, at least a millennium before our period of study, in the Indus Valley or Harappan Culture. However, since that highly advanced, urban, Bronze Age civilization retreated/declined c. 1800 BCE seemingly abruptly, an apparently new line of historical development is conventionally traced from the appearance of the Veda that continues unbroken till today.

2 The *Rig Veda* and all its successor Veda are, in fact, oral texts: they seem to have been composed, memorized, and transmitted from generation to generation of teachers and pupils, in exactly the same form through the centuries. The earliest extant manuscript of the *Rig Veda Samhita* found is perhaps no earlier than the twelfth century CE.

that includes three other Veda (the *Sama*, *Yajus*, and *Atharva*) and their many sub-parts, which are all linguistically later than the *Rig* and believed to have been composed farther east between c. 1000 and 500 BCE. So they are taken by historians to correspond to a Later Vedic period. The transition from the Early Vedic to the Later Vedic saw a growing complexity in ecological, economic, social, and political conditions that resulted in the transition into agrarianism, state society, and urbanism in the post-Vedic period. The history of these early times is reconstructed almost entirely on the basis of these sacred texts since their archaeological context, though hypothesized to be the sparse Grey Ware and Painted Grey Ware (PGW) cultures of the north-west of the subcontinent, is inadequate and uncertain.

Early Vedic people were Indo-Aryan speaking, that is, they used a form of archaic Sanskrit that belongs to the Indo-European family of languages.³ Mainstream historiography maintains that they were pastoral and semi-nomadic. Their chief occupation seems to have been cattle-rearing, as evident from the large number of terms deriving from the Sanskrit word for 'cow' found in the *Rig Veda Samhita*, though they were not unfamiliar with crops such as barley and therefore perhaps with cultivation. Accordingly, cattle rather than land was their chief source of wealth as well as the object (apart from horses and women) of the frequent battles they waged. The Battle of the Ten Chiefs (*Dasharajnya*) seems to have been one such great event. Early Vedic tribes (*jana*) were led by a tribal chief (*rajan*) who received voluntary offerings (*bali*) from the rest of the tribesmen in return for leading them in war. In a pre-state and pre-class society, political organization was coterminous with social organization, which was kin-based and, at the most, differentiated in rank between senior (*rajanyas*) and junior (*vish*) lineages. There are references to various clan gatherings (*sabha*, *samiti*, *gana*, *vidatha*) among whose functions was possibly the redistribution of war-booty. When seen together with the offerings made to the chief, this ceremonial community consumption of the spoils of battle points to the prevalence of something of a reciprocal gift exchange system. There are no conclusive references to money in the *Rig Veda Samhita* nor any words for sale, purchase, and interest, though Early Vedic people knew and handled gold as an object of value. Copper (*ayas*) was also in use but probably for implements and weapons.

3 There is heated and racially tinted debate over the question of whether the Aryans were indigenous to South Asia or immigrated from elsewhere, the latter being the majority view. But see Edwin Bryant, *The Quest for the Origins of Vedic Culture: The Indo-Aryan Migration Debate* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), for an excellent overview of both sides of the debate.

In Later Vedic literature one sees an eastward movement or expansion of tribes into the Indo-Gangetic divide and the upper Ganga basin (the area referred to as Kuru-Panchala), corresponding to modern Punjab, Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh. The most significant change that historians postulate for this period is the growing importance of agriculture over pastoralism. We now get references to cereals apart from barley, like wheat and rice and also lentils, where earlier there was none; these are the staple foods of South Asia till today. The centrality of cultivation now is not only reflected in a number of clear references to ox-driven ploughs and to agricultural and fertility rituals found in later Vedic texts but also seen in archaeology. PGW sites have yielded crop remains from this period as well as 3- to 4-metre-thick deposits, significantly suggesting continuous habitation and the onset of sedentism.

This all-important shift to a reliance on agriculture, with its greater capacity for surplus generation as reflected in the settling down of Later Vedic tribes, may have been in large part due to the access to the highly fertile alluvial soil and greater precipitation in the Ganga basin that these tribes gained. Some historians influentially believe that abetting their exploitation of the wetter and more productive conditions of this region was the discovery of iron and its application to the clearing of dense forests and to the cultivation of the rich clayey soil. Indeed the Later Vedic coincides with the first phase of the use of iron in north India, with stark references in the texts to the 'dark metal' (*krishnayas*) employed in agriculture. However, archaeological evidence for the role of iron in subsistence activities in this early period is not substantial and, on present research, seems to acquire intensity and frequency only from the sixth century BCE onwards (even though the earliest iron objects per se – nails, arrowheads, and the like – archaeologically recovered from the Ganga valley are from 1100–900 BCE in association with Black and Red Ware and PGW). This led other historians to argue that iron was not the prime mover of historical change or surplus creation in this period and that socio-political developments played a greater role.⁴

There were two direct consequences of these developments. One was that the *jana* now transformed into the *janapada* (literally, 'footprint of the *jana*'), that is to say, tribes began to occupy and identify themselves with fixed territories under the aegis of specific ruling clans known as *rajanyas* or, increasingly, *kshatriyas* (warrior class). *Janapadas* were not yet full-fledged

4 For various views on the debate over iron, see B. P. Sahu (ed.), *Iron and Social Change in Early India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

states, but more in the nature of chiefdoms; however, we do find in them traces of the clear emergence of a ruling elite that staked claim to a greater share of the produce and other resources. Thus, the *bali* now ceased to be voluntary offerings from the people to their chief and became an obligatory prestation, the earliest form of a compulsory tribute perhaps. Further, the *rajan* and his kinsmen organized lavish public sacrifices (*shrouta yajnas*), such as the horse sacrifice (*ashvamedha*) and the chariot race (*vajapeya*), that in different ways enacted the claim to superiority of the *kshatriyas* over the rest of the populace that now had become subjects (*praja*). Facilitating and collaborating in the conduct of this 'prestige economy' were the priests (*purohitas*, who coalesced into the *brahmana* class), the ritual specialists who conducted these sacrifices and received a fee in return that took on a more and more elaborate form such as the *rajan* gifting land (which was now an object of value in a settled society) to *brahmanas* in addition to gifting gold, cattle, and horses.

The other concomitant of the generation of a social surplus was occupational diversification and stratification. As a result, for instance, in the Later Vedic period we find the first reference to the fourfold caste system (*varna*) that, with all the complexities it acquired in the centuries that followed, became the hallmark of social organization in South Asia. The *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas*, *vaishyas* (traders and agriculturalists), and *shudras* (menial labourers) were the four social groups, placed in descending order of status, into which the erstwhile tribe split up, as it were. The division was based on both a crystallization of occupational specializations and the attaching of strong accents of ritual purity and hierarchy to them. Later Vedic literature attributed the division to divine origins,⁵ but historians argue that the *varna* system was a consciously worked out structure to define and limit the access to resources and power of a variety of social groups, old as well as new ones that Vedic people encountered and assimilated during their geographical expansion.⁶

The period from 500 to 300 BCE represents the onset of the early historic period in South Asia for which we have plentiful literary and archaeological evidence. It saw the fruition of the several processes of transition that started in the Later Vedic and culminated in the rise of the sixteen great states

5 The earliest reference to the four *varnas* is in the hymn called *Purusha Sukta* that describes the origins of the universe, including the *varnas*, from the body of the Primeval Man (*purusha*). It occurs in the tenth book of the *Rig Veda Samhita* that is chronologically late. *Rig Veda* X.90, in *The Rig Veda: An Anthology*, trans. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (Middlesex: Penguin, 1986).

6 See Vidura Jaiswal, *Caste: Origin, Function, and Dimensions of Change* (Delhi: Manohar, 1998).



Map 18.1 India 600 BCE

(*mahajanapadas*) all along the upper, middle, and lower Ganga basin as well as in the north-west and central parts of the subcontinent, indicating a robust spurt in the process of state formation (see Map 18.1).⁷ These states included Kamboja, Gandhara, Kuru, Panchala, Shurasena, Koshala, Kashi, Vriji, Magadha, Anga, Malla, Matsya, Vatsa, Chedi, Avanti, and Ashmaka. These were distinguishable into two kinds: monarchies (*rajya*) and oligarchies (*gana-sangha*) that were in a state of perpetual aggression against one another, the strong gradually expanding at the cost of the weak. Out of this process four monarchies finally emerged as contenders for supremacy: Koshala with its capital at Shravasti, Vatsa, its capital at Kaushambi, and Magadha with its

7 See Hemachandra Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India: From the Accession of Parikshit to the Extinction of the Gupta Dynasty* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, [1923] 2000).

capital at Rajagriha and later Pataliputra, all based in the middle Gangetic valley, and the fourth, Avanti, with its seat at Ujjayini, in west-central India. Gradually, through a variety of means that included battle and conquest as well as diplomatic and marital alliances, Magadha emerged supreme by the fourth century BCE. It enjoyed a number of advantages in the form of natural and human resources, which have been detailed in Chapter 19 of this volume. The growth and consolidation of the Magadhan kingdom occurred under a series of able dynasts such as the Haryankas, Barhadrathas, Shaishunagas, and Nandas. The Nandas called themselves *ekarat*, or sole sovereign, apparently with justification since their power was acknowledged even by the invading forces of Alexander in c. 326 BCE. Legend has it that the forces were stopped in their tracks on the banks of one of the tributaries of the Indus by, among other things, the fearsome reputation of the mighty Nanda army in the east. The impact of the Greek invasion was thus minimized in South Asia and essentially confined to the north-western region, in ways that we shall see.

Corresponding to the process of state formation and expansion, and significantly interacting with it, was a complex of socio-economic advances that fructified in this period. Among these were the expansion of plough-based wet rice agriculture, the growth of population and settlement sizes, craft specialization and a spurt in artisanal manufacturing, the beginnings of metallic money, a burst in long-distance trade, and the development of writing. The earliest deciphered records of writing in the subcontinent date to the late fourth century BCE and are in the script called Brahmi. The same script over the centuries diversified into regional variations that ultimately became the many different vernacular scripts of this part of the world. Thus, civilization in South Asia as we know it today, in all its antiquity and continuity, was inaugurated in this period.

Taken together, these processes are evidence of what has been termed the 'Second Urbanization', marked by the emergence of many new towns and cities located particularly in the Gangetic valley, but also elsewhere in Northern India. We get vibrant accounts of these in early Buddhist texts in the Pali language, the *Tripitaka* (Three Baskets), especially in the *Jatakas* that are a later part of the corpus.⁸ These included, in geographical order from the north-west to the south-east, Takshashila, Hastinapura, Mathura, Ayodhya, Shravasti, Varanasi, Vaishali, Kaushambi, Rajagriha, Pataliputra, Champa, Tamralipti. In the south-west, they include Ujjayini, Pratishthana,

8 *The Jataka*, ed. Edward B. Cowell, trans. Robert Chalmers et al. (London: Pali Text Society, 1957).

and Mahishmati, along with others that are mentioned in contemporary Buddhist texts, and the remains of which we find evidence of in the archaeological record. Some of these appear as metropolises (*mahanagaras*), while others were smaller towns. Excavations have shown that most had massive ramparts constructed around them. The sheer size of these bastions and their elaborate gateways and moats demonstrates that these were settlements with great significance in the social, political, and economic landscape.

A number of these urban centres developed out of markets or nodes of exchange of produce; they were mostly all manufacturing hubs as well, and the larger ones were typically capitals of kingdoms. Contemporary texts enumerate a wide range of crafts practised in such towns. These included textiles, woodwork, leather work, metallurgy, ivory carving, basket making, pottery, goldsmithing, and perfume making, among others. We are also told of a range of occupations professed by the citizens, such as cultivation, animal rearing, trade, and service of the king. It should be remembered that crafts were produced in both a rural and an urban context, but everywhere they seemed to be localized. In other words, an entire village would be involved in the manufacture of one particular product, such as pots, or one quarter of the city would be inhabited by those who lived by a single craft, such as goldsmithing. Market towns were located along a dense network of overland and riverine commercial routes that came to crisscross South Asia at this time. For example, the Northern route (*Uttarapatha*) that ran from Takshashila in the north-west to the port of Tamralipti on the east coast, through all the major *nagaras* in between, such as Mathura, Kaushambi, Shravasti, and Rajagriha, served as both suppliers and consumers for the raw materials as well as finished goods travelling up and down the route. Similarly, the Southern route (*Dakshinapatha*) connected practically the entire Northern route through Kaushambi to Ujjayini and Pratishthana in the Deccan, and onwards to the port of Bhrigukaccha (Barygaza) on the west coast. Significantly, in times to come, sea routes from the coasts would extend the lines of trade to other lands like West Asia and the Mediterranean on the one hand and East and South-East Asia on the other. Fittingly, big merchants and bankers (*setthi-gahapati*) appear as an extremely wealthy and influential new social group in this period with special access to the king.⁹

9 Accounts of the vibrant social and economic scene in the sixth century BCE can be found in Narendra Wagle, *Society at the Time of the Buddha* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966); Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State: Social Formations in the Mid First Millennium BC in*

Thus a giant network of interregional commercial and cultural contact spanned the subcontinent, dotted by the great cities. This is clearly attested in archaeology, specifically in the recovery of the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), a fine, glossy deluxe ceramic type, and its attendant material culture, across very many Second Urbanization sites in the period from the seventh to the second century BCE. The NBPW assemblages typically entailed cast copper coins and punch-marked silver coins – the first metal money (called *karshapanas* in the texts) in South Asian history. Additionally, burnt-brick buildings with drains, ring wells, iron tools, and instruments, semi-precious beads, and terracotta figurines and seals are other material remains typically found.

The urban culture¹⁰ of the sixth–fifth centuries BCE seems to have spawned an age of intellectual ferment. It saw the birth of two landmark faiths and systems of religious thought: Buddhism and Jainism. Founded by broadly contemporaries, Gautama Buddha and Tirthankar Mahavira respectively, these faiths did not accept the sanctity of the Veda and the ritual authority of the *brahmanas*. Buddhism, which especially gained great popularity among the ruling dynasties of kingdoms like Magadha, preached the four noble truths (*aryacharvarisatyani*) that identified desire as the root cause of human suffering and the renunciation of desire as the path towards salvation (*nirvana*), which lies in the cessation of the endless cycle of birth and rebirth and the misery that it entailed. Like Jainism, which came up as an even more austere and ascetic philosophy that also emphasized celibacy and non-covetousness, Buddhism advocated non-violence toward living beings, which is known as *ahimsa*. The Buddhist and Jaina monastic orders (*sangha*, *matha*) that were formed attracted large followings among the laity and were sponsored by donations made by a cross section of society, especially, but not only, affluent social groups like the merchant class. In time Jainism came to be confined to south and west India, while Buddhism attained a far wider presence both within and without the borders of South Asia from where it momentarily travelled to Tibet, Korea, and Japan apart from Afghanistan and other parts of Central Asia in the early centuries of the Common Era.¹¹

the Ganga Valley (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990); and Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹⁰ For a discussion of this vibrant urban culture in slightly later poetry and drama in Sanskrit, see Shonaleeka Kaul, *Imagining the Urban: Sanskrit and the City in Early India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010).

¹¹ There is a vast body of work on the philosophy and history of Buddhism and Jainism. Readers can begin with A. K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970); and then for more recent reflections see Richard F. Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A*

Interestingly, among the greatest supporters and propagators of these heterodox religions were the Mauryas of Magadha under whose rule (321–181 BCE) the first and largest empire in South Asian history was inaugurated. The Mauryan Empire was founded by Chandragupta Maurya, who is said to have defeated the Seleucids led by Alexander's governor Seleucus Nikator in the north-west region of Gandhara and established a matrimonial alliance with the latter's daughter. Legend has it that Chandragupta was of obscure origins and succeeded thanks to the guidance and inspiration of a wily but moralistic preceptor, his prime minister Kautilya Chanakya, who plotted the expansion of Chandragupta's power from the north-west to the South Asian heartland, Magadha, by usurping the last of the mighty Nandas. It is perhaps no coincidence that Chanakya is credited with authoring the famous Sanskrit treatise on statecraft, the *Arthashastra*, which sets out imperial ideals and ambitions, and discusses statecraft from the point of view of a particular kind of king, the *vijigishu* – the would-be conqueror who desires to conquer the whole earth.¹² This has parallels with the kind of ruler Chandragupta became in history.

Chandragupta (321–297 BCE) took the Magadhan kingdom to the heights of empire. Under him the territory from Gandhara (modern Afghanistan) in the north-west to Girnar (Gujarat) in the west of the subcontinent to Anga (Bengal) in the east and Karnataka (Deccan) in the south, straddling the Vindhyan mountains that cut the subcontinent in half, as it were, all came under one rule. His might is reflected in the testimony of Plutarch, the later Roman chronicler, who believed that 'Sandrocottus' (the Roman name for Chandragupta) overran the whole of 'India' with a force of 600,000 men.

Little is known about his son, Bindusara (297–273 BCE), who succeeded him to the throne, except that under him the Mauryan Empire initiated something of a diplomatic outreach to emperors of realms outside South Asia, a trend that intensified under his son, Ashoka the Great. We learn from Strabo that Bindusara apparently asked Antiochus for some wine and dried figs as well as a sophist for his court! Pliny also mentions that Ptolemy the Second, the ruler of Egypt, sent an envoy to Bindusara.

Social History from Ancient Benaras to Modern Colombo (New York: Routledge, 2006). On Jainism, see Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1979] 2001), and Paul Dundas, *The Jains* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

12 R. P. Kangle (ed. and trans.), *The Kautiliya Arthashastra*, 3 vols. (University of Bombay, 1960–65).

The accession of Ashoka (272–232 BCE) – grandson of Chandragupta and the greatest of the Mauryas – is believed to be a watershed in South Asian history. Sources inform us that eight years after wresting the throne from his father and brothers, Ashoka initiated a military expedition against the region of Kalinga on the east coast that had resisted Mauryan conquest till then. With the bloody annexation of Kalinga, the conquest of the entire subcontinent (except the far south) was complete. The extent and boundaries of Ashoka's empire are marked out, as it were, by the large number of rock and pillar edicts engraved by Ashoka at over two dozen far-flung sites. The pillar edicts are especially striking: for the first time in stone, tall, highly polished columns, usually topped by magnificent sculpted animal capitals in the round (standing for royal power or the Buddhist tradition), inscribed with orders and proclamations of the king, loomed over the landscape, dominating it (see Fig. 18.1). These proclamations, which may have been inspired by Achaemenid royal practices of a similar kind, were addressed to the emperor's subjects and officials and conveyed a unique message of the king's power and piety. In a language known as Prakrit, they espoused a set of socio-ethical principles, such as non-violence, austerity, and concord, that the king claimed to practise himself and admonished his populace, whom he likened to his children, to follow. Scholars increasingly believe that these principles, termed *dhamma* in the edicts, were inspired by Ashoka's personal faith in Buddhism, to which he converted in the middle of what had been a violent and ambitious career. By all accounts, Ashoka zealously patronized Buddhism by innumerable donations to the *sangha* for the construction of monuments and monasteries, and for proselytizing missions to other lands, such as Sri Lanka.¹³

But *dhamma* also seems to have been an imperial strategy to pacify and ideologically unify his sprawling, variegated realm. Consensus among historians is that the Mauryan Empire, though a political formation unprecedented in its size and authority, was not a centralized, monolithic power structure. Indeed it could not have been, given the kind and level of communications available back then. The Mauryan king, based at Pataliputra in the eastern corner of the subcontinent, did not exercise uniform power over the length and breadth of the empire. There were at least three tiers of state control: in diminishing order were the metropolitan area, Magadha; the core areas, that is the highly developed Gangetic valley and Avanti that had been annexed; and the periphery, which comprised all the hilly and forested extremities of

13 For a lucid translation of the Asokan edicts, see the appendix in Romila Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, [1963] 1987).



Figure 18.1 Lion capital at Sarnath, North India (Asia Alan King / Alamy)

central and south India that were not brought under direct Mauryan administration but merely mined for their natural wealth. Thus, the Mauryan state spread horizontally across regions rather than vertically and maintained its unitary character through a sprawling bureaucracy, which included an array of regional governors (*kumara*) and ministers (*amatya*), a massive army, and perhaps also through the paternalistic despotism of its king.

Subsequent to the collapse of the Mauryan Empire under Asoka's unremarkable successors, we see in the period between 200 BCE and 300 CE the rise of a number of smaller territorial powers in its place in different parts of the subcontinent. In the Ganga valley, for instance, the Mauryas were immediately succeeded by the Shungas under Pushyamitra, the general of the Mauryan army who is believed to have assassinated the last Mauryan king in 180 BCE. The Shungas, who ruled for about a hundred years, were replaced by the Kanvas, who quickly made way for the Mitras, each ruling over smaller and smaller areas.

The rise of the Satavahana kingdom in the first century BCE represents the spread of state polity and society to new areas in this period. The Satavahanas, with their capital at Pratishthana (Modern Paithan on the Godavari River), were a major ruling dynasty of the post-Mauryan period that held sway over most of the Deccan region from the first century BCE to the early third century CE. There is uncertainty about who the Satavahanas were and where they came from. While in their inscriptions they claim to be exalted *brahmanas* (*ekabahmana*), the encyclopaedic texts composed at the end of the post-Mauryan period, known as the *Puranas*, call them Andhras, and describe them as lowly social groups. At any rate, the Satavahanas adopted the title of Lord of Dakshinapatha (lord of the South), and Pliny, the Roman chronicler, also says, though perhaps with exaggeration, that the Andhras had many villages, thirty walled towns, and a large infantry, cavalry, and elephant force.¹⁴

The Satavahana territories were divided into a number of administrative divisions known as *aharas*, and we hear of different sorts of officials. However, the basic organization of the empire was feudatory and there existed a number of local rulers or subordinate chiefs in the realm, known as the *maharathis* and *mahabhajas*, over whom the Satavahanas seem to have exercised political paramountcy. Some of the major Satavahana kings were Gautamiputra Satakarni (c. 106–130 CE) during whose reign the kingdom

¹⁴ See A. M. Shastri (ed.), *The Age of the Satavahanas*, 2 vols. (Delhi: Aryan Books International, 1999).

territorially reached its peak, his son Vashishthiputra Pulumavi (130–154 CE), and Yajnashri Satakarni (165–194 CE). The use of metronyms by Satavahana kings and the fact that their queens issued inscriptions donating caves to the Buddhist *sangha* are interesting features. Another remarkable aspect about this dynasty is that they issued coins made of lead and its alloy, potin.

At about the same time further south, we hear of the emergence of what appear to have been chiefdoms or early states. These were ruled by the Cheras from Uraiyur, the Cholas from Vanchi, and the Pandyas from Madurai. They seem to have been ruling chieftain families (*muventar*) in adjacent parts of the southernmost region of the Indian peninsula known as Tamilakam. Each lineage had its own emblem: the Chera bow, the Chola tiger, and the Pandya twin fish. There were smaller chiefs in the area as well, but these big ones are known for their many conflicts with one another.

We know about these political formations mainly through the corpus of early Tamil¹⁵ (oral) poetry, popularly known as Sangam literature,¹⁶ but they are mentioned in Ashoka's edicts as well, indicating Mauryan contact with them, possibly for the purpose of procuring the natural bounties of the south such as pearls, ivory, and sandalwood. Some scholars argue that this contact and exchange may have catalysed a process of secondary state formation in this region. Archaeologically, the region in the period from *circa* 1000 BCE till 300 CE is associated with the iron-using, farming, and animal-rearing Megalithic culture that is so named after the giant stones used to mark burials; the latter part of this period (300 BCE – 500 CE) forms the early historic period in the south and corresponds to the conditions portrayed in the so-called Sangam poems.

Descriptions in these poems, the bulk of which belong to the *Ettutokai* (Eight Anthologies), attest to the prevalence of a variety of economies, which displayed a range in terms of complexity, in different ecological niches (*tinai*) of Tamilakam. For example, *kurinji* (hills) was associated with hunting-gathering, *mullai* (pastures) with cattle-rearing, *palai* (desert) with plundering and cattle-lifting, *neytal* (coast) with fishing and salt-making, and *marutam* (riverine country) was associated with plough cultivation and so with the seats of power. The early historic period was one of crucial transitions in the

¹⁵ Tamil is the oldest among the Dravidian family of South Asian languages (others being Kannada, Malayalam, and Telugu). It is spoken in the extreme south of the Indian peninsula, while Indo-Aryan languages, mostly derived from Sanskrit, have been spatially the most widespread in South Asia.

¹⁶ A. K. Ramanujan, *Poems of Love and War: From the Eight Anthologies and the Ten Long Poems* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985). See also K. Kailasapathy, *Tamil Heroic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

south, including the appearance of a Tamil-Brahmi script, the rise of market towns and ports like Kaveripattinam and Muchiri, the use of coins, the expansion of crafts including bead-working and weaving, and of trading contacts (see Indo-Roman trade below), and the sway of the polities detailed above.

An important area of flux in the post-Mauryan period was the north-west and west-central parts of the subcontinent that witnessed the rule of not one but several dynasties of external origin, often simultaneously, as a result of tribal incursions from Central Asia. The first to come were the Indo-Greeks or Indo-Bactrians who were from the area north-west of the Hindu Kush mountains, corresponding to north Afghanistan. They expanded into the Indus valley and the Punjab and founded a kingdom there, occasionally making inroads as far as the Ganga-Yamuna inter-riverine tract, between the second century BCE and the first century CE. They are known for and by their coins, which not only included the earliest gold coins recovered in South Asia but bore legends and portraits of individual kings, thus facilitating their identification. Indo-Greek rule in the region is also responsible for the growth of Hellenistic cultural influences seen in town planning, on the one hand, and sculpture, on the other. The most famous Indo-Greek king is Menander (165–145 BCE) who seems to have embraced Buddhism.

The next to invade was the central Asian tribe called the Scythians, or Shakas, as they came to be known in India. Different branches of the Shakas took over different parts of north and central South Asia, establishing their rule at Taxila (Pakistan), for instance, and at Mathura (the Ganga-Yamuna tract). Shaka chiefs were known as *kshatrapas*. The strongest and longest-lasting Shaka presence was in Malwa where it continued till the fourth century CE. The best-remembered *kshatrapa* of this line is Rudradamana I (c. 130–150 CE), who entered into a prolonged, oscillating conflict with the Satavahanas. This is something that both the Satavahana Nasik inscription and Rudradamana's Junagadh inscription (the first long inscription in chaste Sanskrit) tell us about.

Close on the heels of the Shakas were the Indo-Parthians or Pehlavas, originally from Iran. They occupied a relatively minor principality in the north-west, their best-known king being Gondophernes (c. 20–46 CE). The last major central Asian force to enter the subcontinent in post-Mauryan times were the Kushanas. The Kushanas were a branch of a tribe bordering China known as the Yuezhi that, as a result of pressure from tribes in their homeland, moved out to other regions. A section known as the Little Yuezhi may have settled in north Tibet while the Great Yuezhi occupied five

principalities in and around the valley of the River Oxus. During the first century CE, a chief by the name of Kujula Kadphises and his sons Vima Takto and Vima Kadphises brought together the five areas and laid the foundations of a unified Kushana Empire that by the early second century extended from the River Oxus in the north to the Indus valley in the south, and from Khorasan in the west to Punjab in the east.

Kushana power reached its height under a king named Kanishka. During his reign, which started *circa* 127 CE (the date earlier assumed for the start of Kanishka's reign was 78 CE, from which a new era, later erroneously called Shakasamvat, was inaugurated),¹⁷ the Kushana Empire extended further eastwards into the Ganga valley reaching right up to Varanasi, and southwards into the Malwa region. A vast expanse spanning diverse cultures – Indic, Greek, West and Central Asian – was thus brought under one umbrella, leading to the commingling of peoples and practices.

Kanishka and his successors ruled till *circa* 230 CE. Their South Asian territories had twin capitals, Purushapura (Peshawar) and Mathura. Though they adopted titles like *devaputra* (son of god), *kaiser* (emperor), and *shahanushahi* (king of kings), the Kushana kings did not exercise direct and absolute control over the whole empire. Large parts were under subordinated rulers (like the Shakas) with the title of *kshatrapa* and *mahakshatrapa*. The Kushanas are a remarkable dynasty because they not only introduced new cultural features to South Asia, such as an improved cavalry with the use of reins and saddle or the trouser-tunic-and-coat style of dressing, but also vigorously embraced elements of indigenous cultures. This is reflected in their patronage as well as adoption of popular religions like Buddhism and Shaivism and their promotion of Sanskrit literature.¹⁸

Indeed the post-Mauryan period as a whole is very significant in the field of culture for it saw the founding of several new trends that came to typify in a sense South Asian religion, philosophy, art, architecture, and literature. For instance, the period witnessed the emergence of those beliefs and practices that we popularly recognize as Hinduism today.¹⁹ These were *bhakti* and

¹⁷ This is, in fact, the official calendar adopted by the government of modern India.

¹⁸ See Baij Nath Puri, "The Kushanas", in Janos Harmatta (ed.), *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia* (Paris: UNESCO, 1994), vol. 11, pp. 240ff.

¹⁹ There are a host of histories of Hinduism. Readers can begin with Gavin D. Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), and for a wider coverage of the many different aspects of Hinduism as a culture, see his edited volume, *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003). For an excellent discussion of Hindu ritual practices, see C. J. Fuller, *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

puja. *Bhakti* refers to devotion centred on a personal god (*ishtadeva*) in contrast to the Vedic cult of sacrifice. It manifested itself in three main theistic cults based on the worship of Shiva, Vishnu, and Shakti around whom complex mythologies were now built in texts like the *Puranas* and the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and on whom elaborate ritual attention was directed. The coexistence of these godheads, who were the focus of independent cults but were part of a common pantheon, can be described as monolatry – the belief in a supreme god while acknowledging the existence of other gods. It is also worth noting that Puranic Hinduism developed in a syncretistic fashion, assimilating and bringing under the fold of these three main cults a number of subsidiary or folk cults. For example, the seminal *Dashavatara* concept associates the worship of Vishnu with that of ten other incarnations, including some that appear to be of totemic origin, such as the boar and the fish. The most popular of the incarnations who enjoyed a wide following already by this period is Vasudeva-Krishna. To him is attributed the *Bhagavad Gita*, the most sacred Hindu scripture, which was composed around the beginning of the Common Era and forms a part of the *Mahabharata*.²⁰

The most important ritual from this period onwards was *puja*, which refers to ceremonial worship involving bathing and anointing the deity and offering flowers, fruits, and camphor to it. The two natural accompaniments of this new form of ritual were image worship and worship in temples, both of which are paradigmatic of religion in South Asia and can be traced to this period. Earliest extant iconic representations of Shiva, Vishnu, and the goddess (at Mathura) are from 100–300 CE, while earliest extant remains of shrines in stone (at Vidisha and Nagari) are from 200 BCE itself.

Interestingly, devotionism came to dominate and transform Buddhism too in this period with the messianic cult of the lofty-minded and merciful bodhisattva assuming centre stage in this form of Buddhism known as Mahayana (the greater vehicle). The direct result of these ideas was the deification of the Buddha and the bodhisattvas, growth of a Buddhist pantheon and mythology, and worship of their images in shrines. This was a significant change from the early faith where the Buddha was venerated only through symbols, and not even as god. Mahayanism was vigorously patronized by Kanishka who organized the fourth great Buddhist council in Kashmir. A number of impressive stupas (funerary mounds), chaityas (prayer

20 *The Mahabharata*, 3 vols., trans. A. B. van Buitenen (University of Chicago Press, 1980–83), and vol. VII, trans. James L. Fitzgerald, 2003. Also edited and translated by J. A. B. van Buitenen, *The Bhagavadgita in the Mahabharata*, bilingual edition (University of Chicago Press, 1981).

halls), and viharas (monasteries) were built at Buddhist sacred sites across South Asia between 200 BCE and 300 CE, including the Dharmarajik stupa at Taxila, the Great Stupa at Sanchi, and the Bharhut, Sarnath, and Amaravati stupas.²¹

Inspired chiefly by Buddhist themes, two important schools of sculpture developed. The Gandhara school flourished in the north-west from the first to the fifth century CE, initially under Kushana patronage. It used blue schist stone and later lime plaster to fashion standing and seated Buddhas in a style that showed distinct Graeco-Roman influence in the naturalism in body forms, heavy, three-dimensional folds of garments, sharp facial features, and wavy or curly hair (see Fig. 18.2). The Mathura school also flourished under Kushana rule. Its distinguishing feature was the use of local red, mottled sandstone. Images of the Buddha and bodhisattvas are in a clearly Indic style, showing a heavy, fleshy body, thin, clinging garments, stiff smile, and shaved head.

Apart from developments in religion and art, the foundations of six classical schools of South Asian philosophy were laid in the post-Mauryan period: these were Mimamsa, Vedanta, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, and Yoga. So too were a number of early treatises composed on law (the *Dharmasutra*), grammar (*Mahabhashya*), metrics (*Chhandasutra*), prosody (*Natyashastra*), medicine (*Charaka* and *Sushruta Samhita*), and erotics (*Kamasutra*). Finally, to the post-Mauryan period can also be traced our earliest surviving texts of the *kavya* genre, or highly aesthetic Sanskrit poetry and drama; Asvaghosha's *Buddhacaritam* and *Saundaranandam* were composed in the first century CE at Kanishka's court, while Bhasa's thirteen plays, such as *Avimaraka*, *Svapnavasavadatta*, and *Karnabharam*, belong to the first three centuries CE.²²

The burst of cultural effort sampled above can be understood against the background of proliferation of centres of political power and interaction with foreign traditions on the one hand, and a burgeoning urban economy with prosperous, upwardly mobile social groups who actively sponsored art, on the other. Indeed the post-Mauryan period can be said to represent the apogee of early historic urbanism. Not only did cities that arose in the sixth century BCE primarily in the Gangetic valley and the Malwa region flourish, but new towns came into being and city life spread to new regions as well,

21 For an overview of early Indian art and architecture, see Susan L. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India* (New York: Weatherhill, 1985).

22 Mauriz Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, 3 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985–93).



Figure 18.2 Buddha on Lion Throne, Gandhara Takht i Bahi, second/third century CE
(Peter Horree / Alamy)

such as Kashmir, Sindh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Orissa, Andhra, Karnataka, and the deep south. Cities in this period show not only extensive construction activity, complex burnt brick buildings, well-laid-out streets and drains, and fortification walls, but the adoption of new techniques such as the use of tiles in flooring and roofing.

At the root of this urban efflorescence was undoubtedly a firm agrarian base and remarkable growth in crafts production. The *Mahavastu*, a Buddhist text from the period, lists thirty-six kinds of crafts in the Magadhan city of Rajagriha alone, and the *Milindapanho* enumerates as many as seventy-five. Some of the artisan groups mentioned are blacksmiths, goldsmiths, jewellers, stonemasons, carpenters, leather workers, oil-pressers, perfumers, garland makers, and also weavers, potters, ivory carvers, sugar manufacturers, corn dealers, fruit sellers, and wine makers! Craftspersons and traders were organized into guilds (*shreni*, *nigama*) and the post-Mauryan period saw a considerable increase in their number and the scale of their activities. Guilds were headed by a chief called the *jetthaka* or *pramukha* who could be close to the king. Guilds could issue their own coins and seals, as have been found at Taxila, Kaushambi, Varanasi, and Ahicchatra. They also functioned as bankers when people wishing to make a donation to the *sangha* deposited a sum of money with a guild. From the interest that accrued on that sum, the guild supplied at regular intervals provisions like grain or cloth, in accordance with the donor's wish, to the *sangha*.

A large number and variety of coins were in circulation, issued by royal dynasties, guilds, and city administrations. They were made of gold (*dinara*), silver (*purana*), copper (*karshapana*) (the Kushanas issued a large number of coppers), lead, potin, nickel, etc. The range of metallic denominations shows that transactions at different levels – high value to small scale – were now being carried out in cash, indicating how deep the monetary economy had reached.

And, finally, trade: if the sixth century BCE was the 'take-off' stage, the post-Mauryan period saw trade activity, both internal and external, overland and maritime, acquire full-blown proportions. Literary sources mention various items involved in trade within South Asia – cotton textiles from the east, west, and far south, steel weapons from the west, horses and camels from the north-west, elephants from the east and south, and so on. Cities were renowned for particular merchandise, like the silk, muslin, and sandalwood of Varanasi, and cotton textiles of Kashi, Madurai, and Kanchi. Goods travelled up and down long distances connecting market towns by an intricate web of land and riverine routes that crisscrossed the subcontinent,

such as the Uttarapatha and the Dakshinapatha, as we have seen. Another route ran from Mathura to Ujjayini and on to Mahishmati, on the one hand, and Bhrigukaccha and Sopara, ports on the west coast, on the other. Many routes then went further south.

South Asia's internal trade networks were integrally linked up with its trans-continental commercial interactions – with Central and West Asia, South-East Asia, China, and the Mediterranean. External trade consisted of two kinds: terminal trade was in merchandise manufactured in India and exported to other shores, or imported for sale in India's internal markets; either way, India was a terminus. Transit trade involved such commodities that originated in and were destined for other lands and only passed through the subcontinent, which functioned as an entrepôt.

The chief stimulus for transit trade was the demand for Chinese silk in the western world. The famous overland Great Silk Route from China to the Mediterranean passed through the northern frontiers of the Kushana Empire – Kashmir and north Afghanistan, touching the cities of Purushapura, Pushkalavati and Taxila. Later, due to instability in the Central Asian region, a part of this trade was diverted south further into India, and then from the Indian ports on the west coast like Bhrigukaccha, Kalyana, and Sopara, travelled on to the Roman Empire via the Persian Gulf. This maritime route was facilitated by the south-west monsoonal winds. (India also had independent trade with China, exporting pearls, glass, and perfumes and importing silk.)²³

Indo-Roman trade, however, went beyond Chinese silk. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*²⁴ and Sangam texts tell us that there was brisk commerce between first century BCE and second century CE in spices, muslin, and pearls that the Romans imported from India. In return, the Romans, described as *yavanas* (foreigners), exported to India wine and certain kinds of jars known as amphorae and a ceramic type named Arretine ware. Most of all, it was Roman gold and silver that poured into the subcontinent as a result of the balance of trade being favourable to India. Pliny, the first-century Roman historian, complains of the drain of gold to India. Hoards of Roman coins, especially of the emperors Augustus and Tiberius, have been found at numerous sites in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. Earlier it was believed that *yavana* traders founded trading colonies or 'emporia' in South Asia at sites like Arikamedu, but historians now feel that this was not

23 See Xinru Liu, *Ancient India and Ancient China: Trade and Religious Exchanges* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).

24 Lionel Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei: Text with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Princeton University Press, 1989).

necessary since groups apart from Indians and Romans, like Arabs of the Persian Gulf and Greeks living in Egypt, may have played the role of middle-men in carrying out Indo-Roman trade.²⁵

The subcontinent also had commercial links with South-East Asia that expanded perceptibly in the post-Mauryan period. The *Jatakas* and the *Milindapanho* refer to traders undertaking difficult sea voyages to Suvarnadvipa (Malaysia and Indonesia) and Suvarnabhumi (Myanmar). Archaeological discoveries in this region corroborate interaction. Imports from south-east Asia to India included gold, tin, spices like cinnamon and cloves, sandalwood and camphor. Exports from India were cotton textiles, sugar, valuable beads, and pottery.²⁶

It is worth noting that social and cultural exchange went hand in hand with commercial contacts with the world. As we have seen, the north-west of the subcontinent was a cultural crossroads that witnessed the commingling of Greek, Persian, and Mongol populations and traditions with the Indic. In the case of China, interaction took the form mainly of the spread of Buddhism – doctrines, scriptures, relics, monks, and pilgrims travelled over many centuries between the two regions, and it is from China that the religion went further east to Japan and Korea and underwent significant transformations. Early South-East Asia was long believed to have been actually settled by people from India, or been the site of a process of ‘Indianization’, since the names, practices, religious affiliations, and rituals of the earliest kingdoms that arose in Java and Sumatra (seen in their inscriptions) are Sanskritic and brahmanical, while both Hindu and Buddhist sculpture and architecture prevail. However, it is now accepted that all this may be evidence only of cultural borrowing for political legitimization by local dynasties rather than of a direct Indian presence and role.²⁷

The period from 300 to 900 CE has relatively recently been christened the early medieval period in South Asian history.²⁸ The first 300 of these years are also known as the Gupta period after the pre-eminent reigning dynasty that founded the largest empire after the Mauryas, while the remaining centuries

25 Vimala Begley and Richard Daniel De Puma (eds.), *Rome and India: The Ancient Sea Trade* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992).

26 Himanshu Prabha Ray and Jean-François Salles (eds.), *Tradition and Archaeology: Early Maritime Contacts in the Indian Ocean* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1996).

27 For a bibliographic survey of the issues, see Monica L. Smith, “‘Indianization’ from the Indian Point of View: Trade and Cultural Contacts with Southeast Asia in the Early First Millennium C.E.,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 42 (1999): 1–26.

28 The nomenclature of early medieval India evolved through the work of different scholars. For a summary see Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, 2012), Introduction.

tend to be clubbed together as the post-Gupta period. However, according to one school of historians, the entire span was united by the onset and maturation of several fundamental changes in the socio-economic fabric of the subcontinent that marked the end of the early historic period and the start of a new formation. These postulated changes included the decline of long-distance trade and, relatedly, the end of a money economy, and the slow decay and desertion of urban centres. This happened along with a certain agrarian shift and ruralization subsequent to the royal practice of making land grants to brahmanas, temples, and officials, with a number of fiscal privileges and immunities attached to the grants. Together these were said to have constituted 'Indian feudalism', a model of political and economic decentralization that was patterned closely on classical European developments.²⁹

Later scholarship, however, has shown the Indian feudalism theory to be deeply flawed and the image of a drastic and pervasive crisis of urban economy and state power as erroneous.³⁰ It has been shown that not only did trade networks and money not vanish from the subcontinent, but also several cities of the Second Urbanization, like Ahichchatra, Champa, Mahasthan, and Kanyakubja, continued to flourish even if several others, like Taxila, Varanasi, and Pataliputra, entered a phase of exhaustion. In any case, agrarian expansion, which was certainly marked in the early medieval period, was never counter to urbanization in South Asian history; on the contrary, the latter had been founded on a strong agricultural base. Indeed, by the eighth and ninth centuries CE, there is evidence of the rise of new urban centres that were commercial and political hubs in various parts of the subcontinent, for example, Tattanandapura and Prthudaka in western India and Kanchi and Thanjavur in southern India. This has, in fact, been termed Third Urbanization by some scholars, who also posit a new perspective in which to see early medieval developments.³¹ They suggest that the real difference from the early historic was that, especially in the post-Gupta period, both urban and commercial networks as well as state formations that now arose

29 The chief architect of this influential theory was Ram Sharan Sharma. See Ram Sharan Sharma, *Indian Feudalism* (University of Calcutta, 1965). It has, however, had many votaries before and especially after him.

30 The critique has come from numerous quarters; for an excellent summation and discussion, see Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, 'State and Economy in North India: Fourth Century to Twelfth Century', in Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Studying Early India: Archaeology, Texts, and Historical Issues* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), pp. 233–62. See also Harbans Mukhia (ed.), *The Feudalism Debate* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1999).

31 For the most important exposition of this alternative perspective, see Chattopadhyaya, *Making of Early Medieval India*.

did not have their epicentre in the Gangetic valley as before but were more diffused across South Asia and subregionally rooted. They also propose a theory of integrative state formation in this period in contrast to the fragmentation presupposed by feudalism; they argue that religion and land grants played an acculturating role, bringing in new areas under cultivation and new groups into the brahmanical fold and caste society. This enabled kings, through their donations to temples and ritual specialists, to acquire sovereignty over a diverse and expanding realm.³² A related consequence of this process of the intensified spread of state society was that the social structure acquired tremendous complexity in the early medieval period. There was, on the one hand, a proliferation of castes (subgroups of *varnas* called *jatis*) characterized by hereditary occupation and endogamy, accompanied by greater systematization and codification of caste laws in the legal treatises of the time. And, on the other hand, there was the emergence of a new intermediary landed class – the recipients of land grants, especially the *agrahara brahmanas* – that enjoyed the right to collect tax from villages granted to them.

It is in this context that the developments and accomplishments of the Gupta and post-Gupta period can be seen. Gupta rule was founded in 319/20 CE by Chandragupta I in the middle and lower Ganga valley (Magadha and Ayodhya). Under his son and successor, the great general Samudragupta (335–375 CE), it expanded exponentially to cover the entire north and central parts of the subcontinent and reach deep into the south where ‘kings of Dakshinapatha’ as well as of Simhala (Sri Lanka), the island country off the Tamil coast, were routed (but astutely spared annexation). We know details of his phenomenal expeditions and multifaceted personality – a man who could wield the lyre with the same proficiency as the battleaxe, apparently – from the ornate Sanskrit panegyric composed by his court poet and inscribed on the Allahabad pillar.³³ The process of Gupta expansion peaked under Chandragupta II (375–415 CE) who conquered western India as well and probably founded his capital city in Ujjayini. Legend links this king with an eponymous king Vikramaditya who populated his court at Ujjayini with learned luminaries. Kumaragupta (415–455 CE) and Skandagupta (455–467 CE) maintained the strength of the empire for another half century (see Fig. 18.3).

32 See Herman Kulke, ‘Fragmentation and Segmentation Versus Integration? Reflections on the Concepts of Indian Feudalism and the Segmentary State in Indian History’, *Studies in History* 4 (1982): 237–63.

33 John Faithful Fleet, *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, India, 1888), pp. 1–17.



Figure 18.3 Dinars of Kumaragupta I (r.425–454) Chandragupta I (r.320–335) (gold), (National Museum of India, New Delhi, India / Giraudon / Bridgeman Images)

Gupta kings adopted imperial titles like *paramabhattacharaka* (supreme lord) and *maharajadhiraja* (great king of kings); however, they did not administer their entire empire directly but seem to have established a network of relations of paramountcy through their numerous battles and conquests. Similarly, they seem to have wielded influence over the neighbouring kingdom of the Vakatakas as well through a Gupta princess who married into the Vakatakas and ruled as regent. The Gupta territories were divided into provinces called *bhuktis* which were in turn divided into districts called *vishayas*, below which were municipalities and villages. They issued a number of stone and copper inscriptions. There can be no doubt that they attained considerable prosperity in their reign since they issued the choicest and largest number of gold coins in early South Asian history. They were also great patrons of culture and of Hinduism, particularly the worship of Vishnu. The earliest structural temples in brick and stone to have survived intact, such as at Deogarh, Bhitargaon, and Eran, belong to the Gupta period. They



Figure 18.4 Relief depicting Varaha. Gupta Art. Early fifth century C.E. Cave 5, Udayagiri, Madhya Pradesh, India (© Luca Tettoni / Corbis)

are small and relatively simple, adorned with some of the earliest narrative friezes based on Hindu mythology. They represent the formative phase of the style of temple architecture known as *nagara* (cruciform plan topped by a spire), which developed into the magnificent, spiralling, and sprawling temple complexes of the medieval period at sites like Konark, Khajuraho, and Somnath. Also from the Gupta period are the rock-cut shrines at Udayagiri (see Fig. 18.4).³⁴

Buddhism also flourished during the Gupta period, notably at centres like Nalanda that emerged as a great monastery and university. Nalanda and like

³⁴ For a detailed treatment of the evolution of temple architecture and its different forms, see Michael W. Meister and Madhusudan A. Dhaky (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture*, 2 vols. (Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies, 1983–88).

it, a little later, Vikramashila, attracted scholars from various parts of the Buddhist world, including China (Tibet), Korea, and Sri Lanka, serving as a site of cross-cultural encounters. Among the subjects taught were grammar, logic, metaphysics, astronomy, and theology. Faxian, the first Chinese monk-voyager to visit India, travelled to several different Buddhist pilgrimage centres across the subcontinent between 405 and 411 CE; he left a record of these sojourns that is called *Gaoseng Faxian Zhuan*.

Among the attainments of the Gupta age, mention must be made of those in the field of science and mathematics on the one hand and the arts and letters on the other – attainments that inspired the label of golden age for this epoch among early historians. Aryabhatta, the great mathematician and astronomer, probably belonged to the fifth century CE. He was the first to give a scientific and correct explanation of eclipses, to discover that the earth rotated on its axis, to calculate the orbit of a planet and the length of a year (an accurate 365.2586805 days). His works also contain fundamental mathematical discoveries: deriving of square roots and cubes (which shows knowledge of the decimal system),³⁵ calculating accurately the value of pi, working out the sine functions and tables (modern trigonometry), and solving complex simultaneous equations (algebra). Later, Varahamihira (sixth century CE) gave us the earliest datable reference to zero as a number.³⁶ He also explained the seasons and meteorological phenomena like clouds, winds, and volume of rainfall. The works of others like Bhaskara I (early seventh century) and Bhaskara II (twelfth century) made further contributions, including the concept of calculus. Many of these works came to be translated into Arabic, which resulted in their spread to the whole world via the Arabs. Hence, some things like the system of numeral notation used globally today (1,2,3,4 . . .) came to be named after the Arabs rather than those who probably invented it! It is in the Gupta period that a miracle of metallurgical technology, the Iron Pillar that stands at Delhi, was forged. Its chemical composition, a mystery to modern scientists, has defied rust and erosion despite being exposed to the elements for over fifteen hundred years!

To the Gupta period also belong the celebrated Buddhist paintings on the walls of the caves at Ajanta, Badami, Bagh, and Kanheri, and the monumental

35 A text of the third century CE, the *Yavanajataka*, already mentions the decimal system of notation. See David Pringee, *The Yavanajataka of Sphujidhvaja: An Astrological Classic*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

36 Zero as a symbol/concept, but not as a number, had already been introduced by a post-Mauryan text.

sculptures in the rock-cut shrines of Ellora and Aurangabad (see Fig. 18.6); several of these painted and sculptural treasure-troves have been declared World Heritage Sites by UNESCO (see Fig. 18.5).³⁷ And between the fourth and ninth centuries, Sanskrit poetry and prose reached its high watermark, represented by the compositions of Kalidasa, Sudraka, Dandin, Bana, Magha, Bharavi, and Bhavabhuti. A number of the major South Asian religious texts, like the *Puranas* and the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, also acquired their final form, while defining socio-legal treatises, like the *Manava Smriti* and the *Narada Smriti*, date from the Gupta period as well.³⁸

Somewhere around the middle of the sixth century CE, the illustrious Gupta Empire began to crumble. The challenges it faced were many, such as the emergence of various regional satraps as well as repeated Huna invasions from the north-west that could not be fended off forever. Some kingdoms that were broadly contemporaries of the Guptas but outlived them were the Gonandiyas and Karkotas of Kashmir (sixth–eighth century), Eastern Gangas of Kalinga (fifth century), the Kadambas of Banavasi, Karnataka (fourth–sixth century), and the Chalukyas of Badami in Karnataka (sixth–seventh century). In the far south the first major kingdom, that of the Pallavas, flourished from the fourth to the ninth century. Until the sixth century they had their base in Andhra and issued a number of inscriptions in Prakrit and Sanskrit, including on copper plates, most of which recorded donations of land to *brahmanas* (*agrarahas*) and temples. After the sixth century, they expanded into the region around Kanchipuram called Tondaimandalam and issued the first bilingual Sanskrit and Tamil land charters.

Land grants often aided the expansion of agriculture to virgin lands through the agency of the donees. The practice of making land grants to ritual representatives and religious foundations would acquire an enormous magnitude under the successors of the Pallavas, the Imperial Cholas, who usurped power from the Pallavas in the ninth century CE, but the pattern of brahmanically legitimated, agrarian-based kingship in the south was laid under the Pallavas. The greatest in a long line of Pallava kings were Mahendravarman I and Narsimhavarman Mammalla (seventh century CE)

37 See *World Heritage Sites: A Complete Guide to 936 UNESCO World Heritage Sites* (Richmond Hill, Ontario: Firefly Books, 2012).

38 For a collection of articles that explore the meanings and functions of a range of early South Asian art forms for their varied communities, see Shonaleeka Kaul (ed.), *Cultural History of Early South Asia: A Reader* (Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2014).



Figure 18.5 Padmpani Bodhisattva Frescoes at Ajanta caves, Aurangabad Maharashtra, India (Dinodia Photos / Alamy)



Figure 18.6 Dhawajastambha in Cave No. 16, Kailashonatha Temple, Ellora, Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India (Universal Images Group Limited / Alamy)

and Dantivarman (late eighth century). With their capital at Kanchipuram, the Pallavas were caught up in a long-running conflict with the Chalukyas of Badami, most memorably against their king Pulakeshin II, and with the Kadambas of Banavasi. They are perhaps best remembered for pioneering the southern style of temple architecture called Dravida (marked in its maturity by towering gateways and pyramidally stacked storeys above the sanctum sanctorum) in the structural temples at Kanchi, as well as for patronizing unique monolithic rock-cut shrines like those at Mamallapuram. The truly defining examples of the grandeur of Dravida architecture, however, belong to the reign of the Imperial Cholas.

Back north, toward the end of the sixth century CE the Pushyabhutis rose to power among a host of other regional rulers. They were based in Thaneshwar (Punjab). Their most famous king, Harshavardhana (606–647 CE), pushed eastwards and set up his capital at Kanyakubja or Kannauj in the middle Ganga valley, which emerged over the next three centuries as an imperial city in its own right. Magadha was a part of Harsha's dominions which extended up to Orissa on the one side and Valabhi on the other, at one point. A major account of Harsha's reign is the *Si Yu Ki* left behind by Xuan Zang, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim who travelled extensively across the subcontinent and stayed many years at Harsha's court.³⁹ He seems to have been in close proximity to Harsha, who comes across as a devout patron of Buddhism. The king donated the revenues of 200 villages for the upkeep of the Nalanda *mahavihara*. We also learn that there was an exchange of six diplomatic missions with the Tang dynasty of China in Harsha's reign. Harsha is known as a litterateur-king with three famous Sanskrit dramas attributed to him. He is also associated with the first royal biography in South Asian literature, the *Harshacharita*, composed by the Poet Laureate at his court, Banabhatta.⁴⁰

Harsha's death was followed by a period of political uncertainty. Kannauj, due to its strategic location, was fought over by a succession of powers. Indeed, it became the bone of contention in what has been termed the tripartite struggle among the Gurjara-Pratiharas of Malwa (seventh–eleventh century), the Rashtrakutas of the Deccan (seventh–tenth century), and the

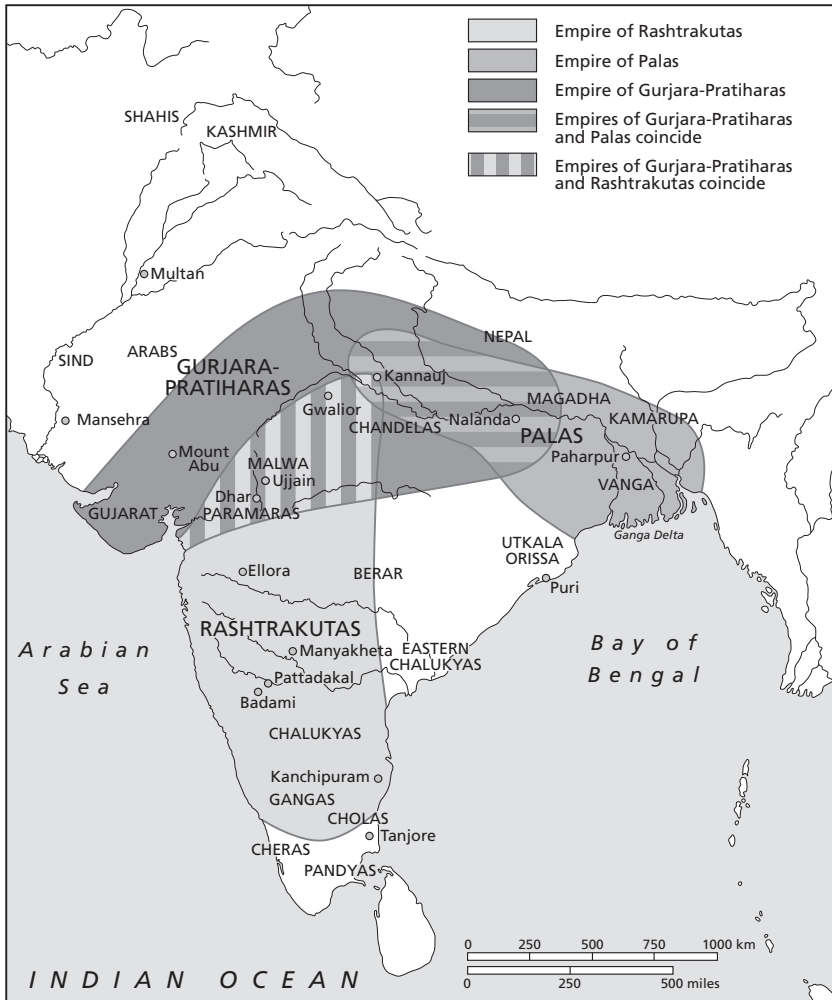
39 *Si-Yu-Ki, Buddhist Records of the Western World*, trans. Samuel Beal, 2 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, [1884] 2004).

40 For more details see Damodar Devahuti, *Harsha: A Political Study* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, [1970] 1983).

Palas of Bengal (eighth–twelfth century). The eighth to ninth centuries were dominated by these three large regional powers, each aspiring to stake claim to the resources of the Gangetic valley and to pan-regional imperialism. The Rashtrakutas, with their capital at Manyakheta, ruled over the entire western Deccan, reaching at their peak as far south as the Indian Ocean and as far north as the Ganga valley. Their most important kings were Dantidurga (who was married into the Pallava family), Dhruva Dharavarsha and his son Govinda III (eighth century), and Amoghavarsha I (ninth century). Amoghavarsha is labelled by historians ‘Ashoka of the South’ for his pacifism and promotion of religion (Jainism) and the arts. The Rashtrakutas issued a number of inscriptions in both Sanskrit and the new vernacular, Kannada; earliest literary works in this vernacular were composed under their aegis. The magnificent Kailashnatha rock-cut temple at Ellora was also constructed by them (see Fig. 18.6).

The Palas, whose most powerful kings were Devapala and Dharmapala (eighth–ninth century), ruled from Munger and later also Pataliputra. They were the undisputed lords of eastern India in the early medieval period, their territories reaching as far east as Kamarupa (Assam) and Utkal (Odisha) at one point, and also up to parts of the north-west of the subcontinent at their height (see Map 18.2). The Palas were great patrons of Buddhist art and architecture and are especially associated with tantric Buddhism (Vajrayana), contributing to its spread to Tibet, Bhutan, and Myanmar. The Palas also had extensive trade and cultural contacts with South-East Asia, as evident from the influence of Pala art styles in the architecture of the Shailendra empire of Java.

The Gurjara Pratiharas, who had among their ranks the likes of Vatsaraja (eighth century), Nagabhata II, and the legendary king Mihir Bhoja (ninth century), started out based in the west with their capital at Ujjayini, but soon assumed the title of ‘King of Kings of the North’ (*maharajadhiraja aryavarta*), even ingressing as far across as Bengal at their peak. While they, the Rashtrakutas, and the Palas took turns at ascending the throne of Kannauj following pitched battles with one another, ultimately after two centuries of conflict, it was the Pratiharas who annexed the imperial city and made it their capital. They were patrons of art and founded the open pavilion form of temple building at sites like Osian, and rebuilt the iconic Somnath temple in Gujarat. The Pratiharas famously repulsed and crushed Muslim Arab invasions from Sindh in the west in the eighth and ninth centuries and were the main resistance to the Turks as well when they came invading from the tenth



Map 18.2 Tripartite struggle over Kannauj

century onwards. In 1017, however, the Turk conqueror Mahmud of Ghazni finally succeeded in sacking the capital city of Kannauj, after which the power and position of the Pratiharas, already under strain from fighting off the Palas as well as local challengers, rapidly dwindled. Turkish invasions continued unabated until the foundation ultimately of the Delhi Sultanate under a Turkish slave dynasty, the Mamluks, in 1206 CE. This marked the beginnings of the medieval period for much of South Asia.

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Regional study: Pataliputra

SHONALEEKA KAUL

Given the sway it came to enjoy over much of the Indian subcontinent in ancient times, it is a matter of surprise that not a great deal is directly documented about Pataliputra, the imperial city of the great Nandas and Mauryas of early historic India. It was situated on the banks of the iconic river Ganga, at the site of modern Patna, the capital of the eastern Indian state of Bihar. Perhaps the earliest reference to Pataliputra is a passing one from the Buddhist canonical texts, the *Tripitaka*, which were composed over the second half of the first millennium BCE. There we are told of a village (*grama*) named Patali where, in *circa* fifth century BCE, a town (*nagara*) was founded when it was selected by Ajatashatru, the Haryanka king of Magadha, as his base to launch the conquest of the neighbouring people, the powerful Vrijjis. A fortification wall seems to have been built around it for the purpose. This modest beginning as a fortified settlement was also a portentous beginning, for Pataliputra's fortunes came to be inextricably linked to the political destiny of the kingdom to which it belonged and which it had served. Within a generation of the success of the Vrijji campaign, Udayin, Ajatashatru's grandson and successor, took the historic step of shifting the royal capital from the hill-fortified Rajagriha to the river-encircled Pataliputra. From then on the city went from strength to strength, becoming the seat of the spectacular expansion of Magadha under the Nanda dynasty in the fourth century BCE and of its emergence as an empire under the Maurya dynasty in the third century BCE. Thus, though there are several facets to this first imperial city of South Asia, it is appropriate to begin by charting its political history.¹

In the sixth–fifth century BCE, political formations known as the *mahajanapadas*, or great states, had come into being all over north, north-west, and

1 Details on political history in this chapter are based on Hemachandra Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India: From the Accession of Parikshit to the Extinction of the Gupta Dynasty* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, [1923] 2000).

central India. Distinguishable into monarchies (*rajya*) and non-monarchies or oligarchies (*gana-sangha*), sixteen of these are enumerated by the Buddhist texts. They appear to have been in a constant state of aggression with one another, the strong gradually expanding at the cost of the weak.

Out of this process four monarchies finally emerged as contenders for supremacy: Koshala with its capital at Shravasti, Vatsa, its capital at Kaushambi, and Magadha, all based in the middle Gangetic valley, and the fourth, Avanti, with its seat at Ujjayini, in west-central India. One by one, between the sixth and the fourth centuries BCE, Magadha came to best the others, sometimes directly by war and annexation, sometimes through indirect means of diplomacy and marriage alliances. A number of factors proved to be assets for Magadha. It was situated not only in the fertile Gangetic basin where intensive agriculture yielded ample revenues, but also on the mineral-rich Chhotanagpur Plateau; historians believe Magadha's favourable geographic location gave it easy access to abundant iron ore and coal, which, in turn, gave it an edge in the manufacture of weaponry, such as the catapult and a covered chariot with swinging mace. Similarly, Magadhan forests yielded war elephants, a crucial factor in ancient Indian warfare. And her riverine location, girdled by the Ganga and two of her tributaries, the Champa and the Son, facilitated the movement of troops as well as traders.

Bringing these natural advantages together was a series of enterprising and vigorous dynasties that occupied the throne first at Rajagriha and then at Pataliputra. Though the Barhadrathas are mentioned in the dynastic lists contained in the *Puranas*, texts composed in the first half of the first millennium CE, as the earliest Magadhan dynasty, we know little about them. The Haryankas appear to have been the first major ruling family of Magadha. Bimbisara of this dynasty was a contemporary of the Buddha and he, together with (ironically) his parricide son Ajatashatru, laid the foundations of Magadha's early success.

Bimbisara contracted matrimonial alliances with princesses of various *mahajanapadas*, like Koshala, Videha, Madra, and the Vrijiis. This fortified Magadha's position tactically as well as yielded territorial gains, such as a part of the kingdom of Kashi in dowry from the Koshalan king, Prasenajit, who had annexed Kashi earlier. Bimbisara also seems to have been on cordial terms with the powerful king of Avanti, Pradyota, since he is said to have sent the latter his court physician, Jivaka, to attend on him in illness. Thus neutralizing his main opponents, Bimbisara gained a free hand to pursue military expansion against others, like the kingdom of Champa to the east, which was now included in Magadha. Not for nothing did he enjoy the title

of *Seniya* (martial). Interestingly, however, we are told by Jaina texts like the *Uttaradhyayana Sutra* that Bimbisara along with his wives converted to Jainism, a steadfastly pacific faith; he is believed to have met Mahavira, the last and most famous *tirthankara* (teacher) of that faith, who belonged to one of the Vriji ruling families into which Bimbisara had married. Buddhist texts like the *Sutta Nipata*, on the other hand, claim he was a devout follower of the Buddhist faith; he is represented as having been in frequent and close contact with Gautama, the Buddha, who visited the capital Rajagriha and was gifted a park called the Venuvana by the Magadhan king, who hosted him and his retinue (the *sangha*).

Bimbisara ruled from approximately 545 to 493 BCE. He was succeeded, in fact deposed, by his son Kunika, also known as Ajatashatru (493–462 BCE). Ajatashatru is also associated later in his life both with Jainism and with the Buddha and his teaching of ahimsa (non-violence), and is credited with organizing the first Buddhist Council at Rajagriha for compiling the Buddha's preachings. His inclination towards non-violent creeds notwithstanding, for most of his reign, Ajatashatru was an aggressive campaigner for Magadha's territorial expansion. He opened military fronts one by one with Koshala, the Vrijis, as well as Avanti, and achieved difficult but decisive victories in battles that spanned many years.

We have noted Ajatashatru's role in the fortification of Pataliputra; in the *Puranas* his grandson and successor Udayin is credited with the founding of the city. He seems to have shifted the royal capital to Pataliputra, which perhaps also means he had it laid out and built up, and various administrative, artisanal, and trading groups settled there. With the increasing power of Magadha and the development of trade and commerce along the Ganga, Pataliputra, located at the confluence of the Ganga and the Son rivers, must have seemed a suitable choice. More on this later. In c. 430 BCE the Haryankas were replaced by the Shaishunaga dynasty named after Shaishunaga who was a minister (*amatya*) at the royal court and apparently ascended the throne with popular consent. In the Shaisunaga reign the kingdoms of Vatsa and Koshala may have been annexed by Magadha. The second Buddhist Council was also held at Vaishali now.

The Shaishunaga dynasty came to a bloody end; the last king and his sons were murdered in circa 364 BCE by a man named Mahapadma who started the powerful line of the Nanda rulers of Magadha. Ironically, his origins were by all accounts obscure and dubious. The Greek chronicler Curtius says he was a barber who became the queen's lover and deposed the king. The Jain textual tradition also calls him the son of a barber born of a courtesan.

Buddhist texts say the Nandas were of unknown lineage (*annatakula*), while the *Puranas* describe them as *adharmika*, loosely translated as outcasts or those who did not conform to society's religio-moral principles and practices.

Despite his unorthodox character, or some would say because of it, Mahapadma seems to have attained unprecedented heights of power. He is described in the *Puranas* as *ekarat*, or the sole sovereign, the first king in the history of South Asia to have merited such an epithet. He is also called *sarvaksatrantaka*, or the uprooter (destroyer) of all warriors. He established an empire and an army that continued till his ninth and last descendant, Dhanananda, to deter and inspire fear in enemies. Thus in 326 BCE, even Alexander's forces saw cause to pause their invasion of the lands to the east of the Indus River at the prospect, among other factors, of facing the might of the Nandas. Curtius stated that the Nanda army consisted of 2,000 chariots, 3,000 elephants, 20,000 cavalry, and 200,000 infantry. There are also references to the fabulous riches of Dhanananda's court. Clearly, Magadha's might under the Nandas was based on effective extraction and deployment of resources by the state and the creation of formidable military force on this foundation. We do not, however, have details of the administrative, revenue, or military organization at Pataliputra in this period. Much of what we know of the early rulers of Magadha is based on legends in literature.

It seems that the last Nanda ruler of Pataliputra was oppressive and cruel, and this in part played a role in bringing him down. Tradition has it that the atrocities committed by him on a learned *brahmana* of Taxila, Vishnugupta, caused the latter to vow to bring about his downfall. This Vishnugupta is believed to be the same as Kautilya Chanakya, the famed author of the *Arthashastra*, among the earliest and most brilliant treatises in the world on statecraft and empire building. He is also believed to be the wily but moralistic prime minister of Chandragupta Maurya, the man who felled Dhanananda and founded the great Mauryan Empire. The story is captured in a Sanskrit work of historical drama from the fifth century CE called *Mudrarakshasa*, written by Vishakhadatta. The play is set retrospectively in Pataliputra in what would be c. 321 BCE. The young Chandragupta, under Chanakya's inspiration and instructions, has defeated and secured as ally Seleucus Nikator, Alexander's Greek governor in the north-west of the Indian subcontinent. Thereafter, he has brought down the last Nanda king, and entered, triumphant, the city of Pataliputra. The play re-creates, in a terse, fast-paced sequence of events, the machinations of Chanakya by which he checkmates and wins over remaining loyalists of the Nandas, thereby quashing chances of a coup and fortifying the nascent regime of the prince

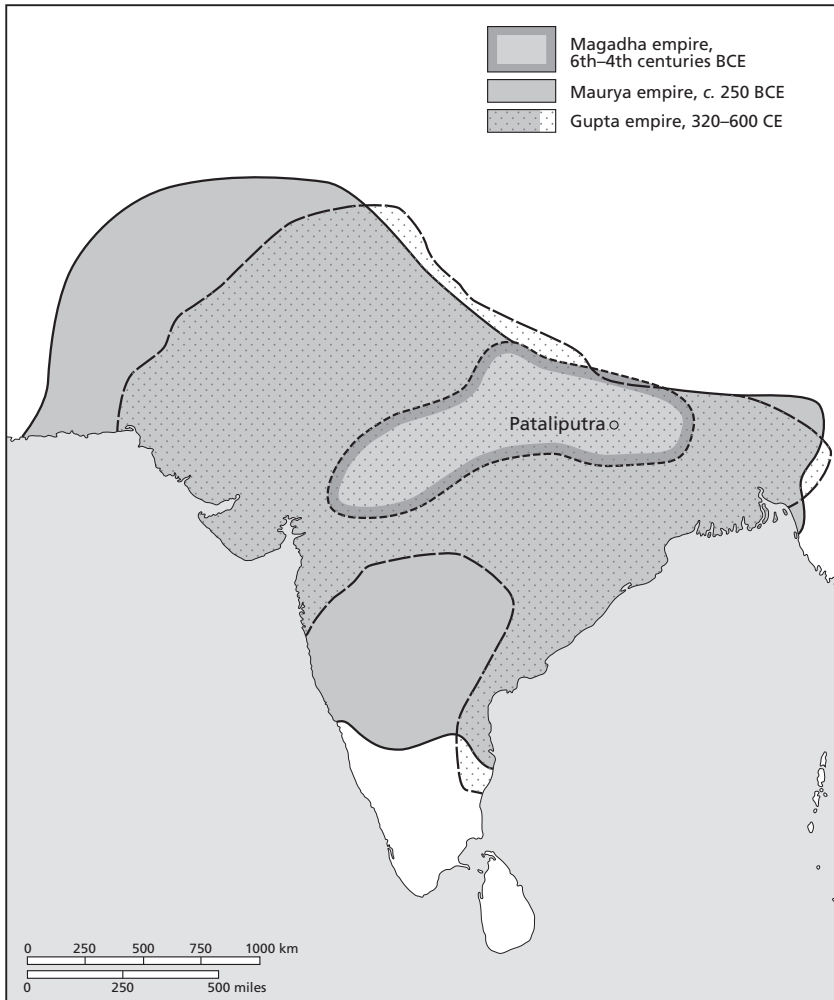
he has just enthroned. The highlight of the play is the many spies and agents in action all over the city of Pataliputra who often do not know of each other even as their moves interlock and bring about the success of Chanakya's larger plan. This, incidentally, conforms to the importance placed on espionage in the prescriptions of the *Arthashastra*.

The *Arthashastra* is a strictly theoretical work and does not mention Pataliputra, Magadha, or the Mauryas. Hence, we do not draw on it in any detail for a discussion of the historical reality of Pataliputra in this chapter. It is significant, however, that the text, some part of which is believed to have been composed in the Mauryan period, sets out imperial ideals and ambitions, and discusses statecraft from the point of view of a particular kind of king, the *vijigishu* – the would-be conqueror who desires to conquer the whole earth. This has parallels with the kind of ruler Chandragupta became in history.

Under Chandragupta (321–297 BCE) the Magadhan kingdom spread out into an empire, stretching from Gandhara (modern Afghanistan) in the north-west to Girnar (Gujarat) in the west of the subcontinent to Anga (Bengal) in the east and Karnataka (Deccan) in the south, across the Vindhyan mountains that cut the subcontinent in half, as it were, separating north from south (see Map 19.1). Plutarch, the Roman chronicler, states that Sandrocottus (the Roman name for Chandragupta) overran and subdued the whole of 'India' with an army of 600,000. He is believed to have travelled to Karnataka in the south and embraced the Jain faith towards the end of his life.

His son and successor Bindusara (297–273 BCE) is best known for the diplomatic outreach of the Mauryan Empire under him. According to Strabo, an ambassador of Antiochus, the king of Syria, was at Bindusara's court at Pataliputra; the latter apparently asked Antiochus for some wine and dried figs as well as a sophist to be sent to him! Similarly Pliny mentions that Ptolemy the Second, the ruler of Egypt, sent an envoy to Bindusara.

The accession of Ashoka (272–232 BCE) – grandson of Chandragupta and the greatest of the Mauryas – seems to have been accompanied by a great deal of fraternal conflict and bloodshed over the throne of Pataliputra. Soon after coming to power, Ashoka annexed the Kalinga region (on the coast of Orissa) that had resisted Mauryan takeover till then. The empire now encompassed the entire subcontinent but for the extreme south. The extent and boundaries of Ashoka's empire are marked out, as it were, by the large number of rock edicts engraved by Ashoka at over two dozen sites. These proclamations are addressed to his subjects and officials and convey a



Map 19.1 Magadha kingdom, Mauryan Empire, and Gupta Empire

unique message of the king's power and piety. They espouse a set of ethical principles, such as non-violence and concord, that the king claims to practise himself and admonishes his populace, who are like his children, to follow. Scholars believe these principles, termed *dhamma* in the edicts, were inspired by Ashoka's personal faith in Buddhism, which he patronized with a vengeance by numerous donations to the *sangha*, for the construction of Buddhist stupas and monasteries, and for proselytizing missions to other

lands like Sri Lanka. But *dhamma* also seems to have been an imperial strategy to pacify and ideologically unify his sprawling, variegated realm.

In any case, consensus among historians is that the Mauryan king, based at Pataliputra in the eastern corner of the subcontinent, did not exercise uniform power over the length and breadth of the empire and that there were at least three tiers of state control which diminished from the metropolitan area, Magadha, in the centre, to core areas, the Gangetic valley, and finally to the periphery, which were all the hilly and forested extremities of the south which were not under direct Mauryan administration.

Ashoka was succeeded by a few 'weak' kings, the last of whom, Brihadratha, seems to have been murdered in 185 BCE by his commander-in-chief, a *brahmana* named Pushyamitra, who founded the Shunga dynasty at Pataliputra. The kingdom under the Shungas shrank considerably: it seems to have extended from Magadha to Ayodhya and Vidisha. The Shungas ruled for about a hundred years and were replaced in quick succession by the Kanvas and the Mitras, who were short-lived. The next major political formation to be based in Magadha was only in the fourth century CE, under the Gupta rulers.

Pataliputra is historically best associated with the period of Mauryan rule when it seems to have come into its own as an imperial city. Quantitatively too, sources from this time begin to be available more generously and tell us specifically and at some length about the great Mauryan capital. It is desirable, therefore, to pause the political narrative at this juncture and situate it within a larger material and cultural background, which would also flesh out the discussion so far.

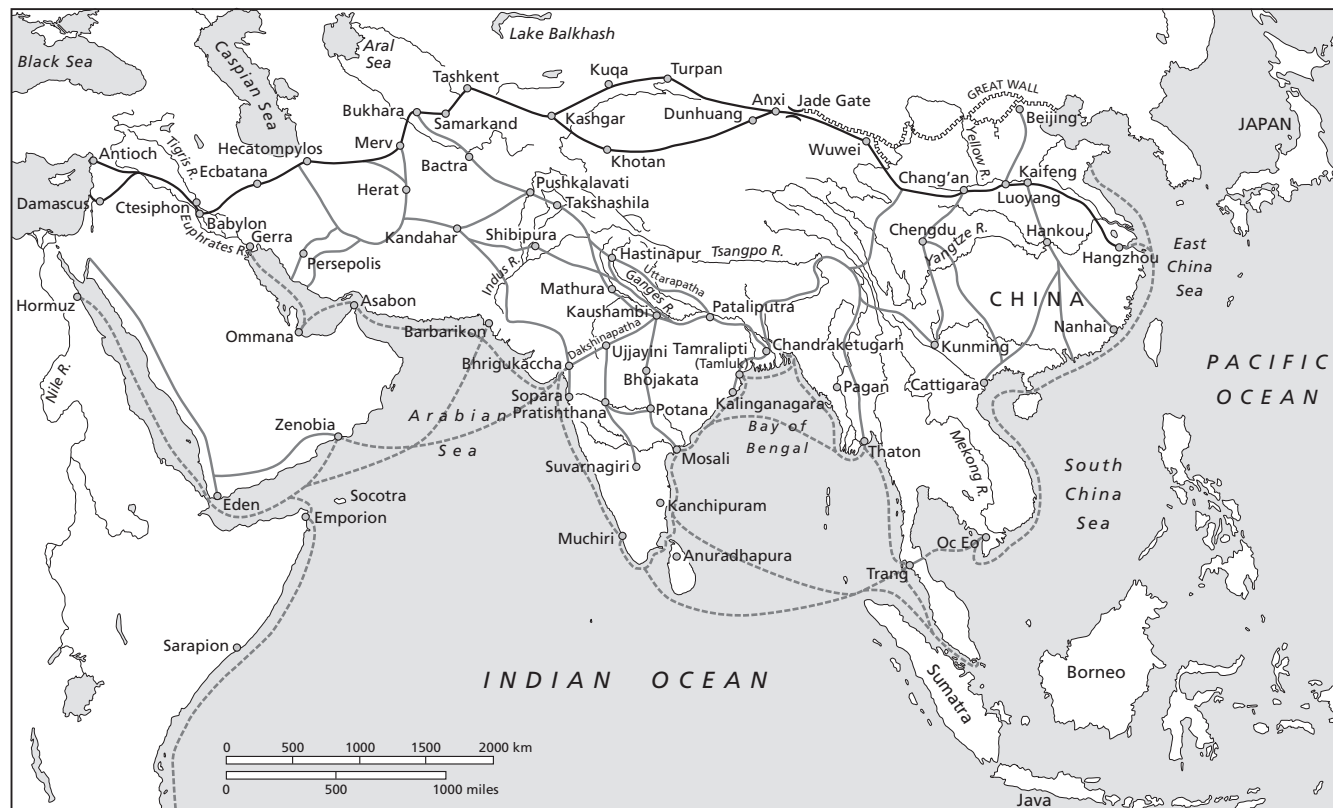
Concomitant to the process of state formation and expansion that began in the sixth century BCE, and significantly interacting with it, was a complex of socio-economic advances that fructified between the sixth and the third centuries. Chief among these were agrarian expansion, demographic growth, craft specialization and artisanal production, monetization of exchange, burgeoning of long-distance trade, and the spread of writing. The foundations of civilization in South Asia, ancient and unbroken, as we know it today, were laid in this period. These processes together signified what has been termed 'Second Urbanization' or the emergence of a large number of towns and cities especially but not only in the fertile Gangetic valley. These included, in rough order from the north-west to the south-east of the subcontinent, Takshashila (Taxila), Hastinapura, Mathura, Ayodhya, Shravasti, Varanasi, Vaishali, Kaushambi, Rajagriha, Pataliputra, Champa, Tamralipti, and, in the south-west, Ujjayini, Pratishthana, and Mahishmati,

among several others that we read of in the Buddhist texts as well as find in the archaeological record. Some of these appear to have been regarded as megalopoleis (*mahanagaras*), while others occurred on a smaller scale. As excavations have shown, most had ramparts built around them which, “by their massiveness, constructional care, and elaborately laid out gateways, bastions, and moats, were meant to mark out and defend a settlement whose significance in the social, political, and economic landscape was far greater than that of a village.”² Indeed, two of the terms for ‘city’ in early Indian literature, *durga* and *pura*, imply a fort or citadel. Within the fortification walls, the city was generally laid out along main and subsidiary streets and divided into various quarters (individual sites show considerable variety and detail).

Many of these urban centres emerged around markets or nodes of exchange and were centres of manufacture, apart from being political capitals. They were located along a dense network of overland and riverine commercial routes that came to crisscross the subcontinent at this time, for example, the Northern route (*Uttarapatha*) that ran from Takshashila in the north-west to Tamralipti on the south-east coast, through all the major *nagaras* in between like Mathura, Kaushambi, Shravasti, and Rajagriha, which served as both suppliers and consumers for the raw materials as well as finished goods travelling up and down. Similarly, the Southern route (*Dakshinapatha*) connected practically the entire Northern route through Kaushambi to Ujjayini and Pratishthana in the Deccan, and onwards to the port of Bhrigukaccha on the west coast. From the coasts, sea routes extended the lines of trade to other lands like West Asia on the one hand and South-East Asia on the other.

The cities that lay on these routes within the subcontinent were thus woven together in a great web of interregional contact, both commercial and cultural (see Map 19.2). This is reflected by the archaeological culture associated with, and named after, the fine, glossy deluxe pottery, the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), which has been recovered from excavations at very many Second Urbanization sites between the seventh and second centuries BCE. Striking amidst the NBPW assemblages were punch-marked silver coins and cast copper coins, the first metal money in South Asia. Burnt-brick buildings with drains, ring wells, iron artefacts, semi-precious beads,

2 Shonaleeka Kaul, *Imagining the Urban: Sanskrit and the City in Early India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010), p. 52.



Map 19.2 Asian trade routes in c. third century BCE

and terracotta figurines and seals are other material remains found at several NBPW sites.

Pataliputra can be understood as a product par excellence of the Second Urbanization. From its location at the confluence of two major rivers, the Ganga and the Son, three great routes radiated to the frontiers of the Mauryan Empire: the south-western to Bhrgukaccha by Kaushambi and Ujjayini, the northern to Nepal by Vaishali and Shravasti, and the north-western, the longest, to Bactriana by Mathura and Takshashila. Downstream, Pataliputra was connected to Tamralipti and thus perhaps with Myanmar and South-East Asia, called Suvarnabhumi (golden land) in the Buddhist texts that describe the difficult sea voyages of intrepid merchants to these lands.

It was not just goods, but also people and ideas, that travelled along these routes, tending to converge on an imperial capital like Pataliputra. For example, Panini, the great Sanskrit grammarian of Taxila in the fifth or fourth century BCE, is associated with the Nanda court at Pataliputra by one textual tradition. So also Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya, arrived in Pataliputra from Arachosia in modern Afghanistan. It is in his account, titled *Indica*, that we get a first-person description of the city. Though the *Indica* has not survived in its original form, parts of it were reported by later Greek chroniclers Strabo and Arrian. Here is what they said citing Megasthenes:

According to Megasthenes the mean breadth (of the Ganges) is 100 stadia, and its least depth 20 fathoms. At the meeting of this river and another is situated Palibothra, a city eighty stadia in length and fifteen in breadth. It is of the shape of a parallelogram, and is girded with a wooden wall, pierced with loopholes for the discharge of arrows. It has a ditch in front for defence and for receiving the sewage of the city. The people in whose country this city is situated is the most distinguished in all India, and is called the Prasii. The king, in addition to his family name, must adopt the surname of Palibothros, as Sandrakottos, for instance, did, to whom Megasthenes was sent on an embassy. [Strabo]

It is farther said that the Indians do not rear monuments to the dead, but consider the virtues which men have displayed in life, and the songs in which their praises are celebrated, sufficient to preserve their memory after death. But of their cities it is said that the number is so great that it cannot be stated with precision, but that such cities as are situated on the banks of rivers or on the sea-coast are built of wood instead of brick, being meant to last only for a time, – so destructive are the heavy rains which pour down, and the rivers also when they overflow their banks and inundate the plains, – while those cities which stand on commanding situations and lofty eminences are built

of brick and mud; that the greatest city in India is that which is called Palimbothra, in the dominions of the Prasians, where the streams of the Erannoboas and the Ganges unite, – the Ganges being the greatest of all rivers, and the Erannoboas being perhaps the third largest of Indian rivers, though greater than the greatest rivers elsewhere; but it is smaller than the Ganges where it falls into it. Megasthenes informs us that this city stretched in the inhabited quarters to an extreme length on each side of eighty stadia, and that its breadth was fifteen stadia, and that a ditch encompassed it all round, which was six hundred feet in breadth and thirty cubits in depth, and that the wall was crowned with 570 towers and had four-and-sixty gates. [Arrian]³

On the basis of these statistics, one modern estimate puts the size of Palimbothra or Mauryan Pataliputra at a little over 9 miles in length and nearly 2 miles in breadth, with a circumference of around 21 miles⁴ – by far ‘the greatest city in India’ of the time. Sadly, actual finds from the ancient site, corresponding to modern-day Patna city, hardly help us reconstruct the observed greatness. Though there are said to be ruins scattered over the length of the modern habitation, dense population and constructions above and subsoil water below have prevented extensive archaeological excavation, making Pataliputra one of the most important cities of the ancient world to have been least explored!

However, of the uncovered ruins, findings from two sites within are significant. At Bulandibagh remains of a wooden palisade have been found. Two parallel walls of wooden uprights, 24 feet high, separated by some 12 feet and resting on a gravel foundation, formed this timber rampart which must have had a filling of gravel, mud, or perhaps stone. Intermittent excavations traced this complex for about 350 feet, initially in an east–west alignment followed by a north–south one where the wall must have taken a bend. A wooden drain was also discovered running mostly along this wall. While the full extent and the stratigraphy of the rampart remain uncertain, circumstantial evidence suggests this may have been the wooden wall surrounding Pataliputra that Megasthenes referred to.

The size of the total area enclosed by the wooden ramparts has been conjectured to enclose anywhere between 1,200 hectares in one estimate and

3 John W. McCrindle (ed. and trans.), *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian* (Calcutta: Thacker and Spink, 1877), pp. 30–174.

4 These figures are based on estimates carried in Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *The Archaeology of Ancient Indian Cities* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 210, and F. Raymond Allchin, *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia: The Emergence of Cities and States* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 202.

2,200 hectares in another. The urban area proper enclosed by the city moat would have been less, about 340 hectares according to one scholar. Compare this with some of the other *mahanagaras* of the Mauryan Empire which, it has been calculated in the same study, would have enclosed, respectively, no more than 240 hectares for Rajagriha, the old Magadhan capital; no more than 180 hectares for Toshali (the site of Shishupalagarh), which was the centre of the eastern province of the Mauryan Empire, or 120 hectares for Ujjayini, the western provincial headquarters, or 60 hectares for Taxila, the north-western one. If these estimates are even near correct, it is abundantly clear that 'Pataliputra would have been far larger than any other south Asian city of its day, and on this score alone would certainly qualify for the title of Metropolis.'⁵ Though hazarding population estimates for ancient times is much more difficult, Pataliputra's size would suggest that well over 40,000 people inhabited the city in the Mauryan period, and this would be a conservative figure.⁶

From the other site, Kumrahar, remains of a pillared hall and a series of wooden platforms nearby have been found. The hall, open from all four sides, seems to have rested upon a substructure of timber and consisted of pillars of sandstone, some 32 feet tall, bearing a distinctive polish. Historians believe that in the early Mauryan period there would have been ten rows of pillars with eight pillars in each row when the monument was erected. It seems to have been burnt down *circa* 150 BCE under the Shungas, who succeeded the later Mauryas. There has been much conjecture concerning the nature and function of this magnificent monument. Its resemblance to Achaemenid structures at Persepolis and elsewhere has often been noted and has led some to believe it was part of the royal palace. But others have seen it as a religious edifice, perhaps a Buddhist hall, while one scholar has suggested that it was more probably an open-air pavilion for royal relaxation and that the wooden platforms nearby may represent a broad staircase used by distinguished visitors.⁷

As yet, no comparable stone monuments associated with the Mauryan period are known from Pataliputra, perhaps because of the sparseness of excavations, but the discovery of a number of fragments of polished stone

5 Allchin, *Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia*, p. 202.

6 This figure of 40,000 is a conservative one arrived at following Georg Erdosy's use of Robert McC Adams' formula of density of 120 persons per hectare. See Allchin, *Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia*, p. 109.

7 Details gleaned from Chakrabarti, *Archaeology of Ancient Indian Cities*, pp. 210–11, and Allchin, *Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia*, pp. 202–204.

sculptures and architectural elements is strongly suggestive. It can be seen in conjunction with the evidence of the great Ashokan polished stone pillars, more than 40 feet tall, topped with massive animal capitals and often bearing royal edicts, that were erected by the Mauryan king at some half a dozen places in the Ganga valley (though not at Pataliputra). Without a doubt, monumental architecture and sculpture in stone both made their first appearance in South Asia in the Mauryan period.

In this context one should also mention the Didarganj *yakshi*, the glossy, perfectly moulded, voluptuous sandstone image in the round of a female chauri-bearer or fly-whisk bearer that was found from a village near Patna and is believed to be from around the Mauryan period (see Fig. 19.1). It is testimony to the high standards of art and aesthetics, and indeed related technologies, practised and patronized in the Mauryan Empire, including by the state itself. At the same time, a number of largely hand-modelled terracotta figurines have also been found from Pataliputra, depicting a variety of animals and birds and, most strikingly, female figures with headgear, often in dancing poses. Their sophisticated treatment, despite the earthy medium (fired clay), has been interpreted as pointing towards specialized urban crafts production catering to a thriving popular urban cultural scene in Pataliputra.

We can get a far more evocative picture of urban culture and ambience in the royal city of Pataliputra from literature. While there may be a paucity of archaeological evidence, in texts we find a celebration of cities generally and, among all cities, of Pataliputra in particular. In this regard, significant portrayals are found in a genre of Sanskrit texts known as *bhāṇa*. These are erotico-comic monologue plays composed probably in the fourth–fifth century CE. At least two of these plays, the *Ubhayabhisarika* and *Dhurvitasamvada*, are explicitly set in Pataliputra, which is called here Kusumapura, or the city of flowers. The monologist in the plays, walking about the city, declaims on the sights and sounds thus:

How wonderful is the supreme beauty of Kusumapura! Here between the rows of houses the streets, which are well-watered, well-cleaned, and are scattered over with flower offerings . . . look like the (floors) of dwelling houses! And at intervals, shop fronts have become interesting due to the people engaged in buying and selling of various commodities. By the recitation of the Vedas, musical performances, and the twangs of bow-strings, palaces are calling out to one another, as it were, like the ten mouths of Ravana. Sometimes, lightning-like women, curious to have a look at the streets, open the windows of cloud-like palaces . . . Moreover, important



Figure 19.1 The Didarganj Yakshi, Patna Museum, Patna, India / DEA / G. Nimatallah (Getty Images)

high officers of the king, mounted on horses, elephants and chariots, add to the beauty of the scene. And young serving-maids wearing ornaments are going about with attractive movements. They are able to catch the eyes of young men and to carry off their mind . . . Daughters of courtesans, the beauty of whose lotus-like faces is being drunk by the eyes of all people,

are gracefully walking up and down, as if to bestow favours on the thoroughfare.

Due to lack of any fear among the people, their constant participation with happy faces in festivals, their graceful wearing of jewels, and their gorgeous decoration of the body with garlands, scents, and fine clothes, their interest in various diverting sports, and for their other equally well known qualities, the earth with Pataliputra as her *tilak* (head mark), appears like heaven.⁸

It is in the fitness of things that the city of Kusumapura, unlike other cities, enjoys in the world, an unexceptionable reputation. Many are the high buildings in it. From its very dense population as well as its heaps of merchandise, people are astonished to mark its special opulence. But what is there to be astonished at?! There are other wealthy cities too. [Here now] are some of its features that are *not* found commonly. It has been said:

Here donors are plentiful. Arts are prized. The company of women can be enjoyed through polished manners. The rich are neither conceited nor jealous. Men are not without learning. All speak politely. They esteem highly one another's merits and are grateful (to their benefactors). (In short,) even gods can find happiness in this city after quitting heaven.

It is a pleasure to pass along the royal road of Kusumapura, even though it is very crowded and appears frightening like the ocean with (surging) waves.

Here nobody, seeing me, rushes off breaking his conversation with me even if he is in a hurry. Even in a crowd, room is made for me to move about. Everyone is joyful, no one detains me for long, lest it should spoil my business. To be sure, the fame that has accrued to this great city is maintained by people well versed in worldly ways . . .⁹

Even allowing for poetic fancy and embellishment, the point to note is the emphasis the *bhanas* self-consciously place on associating Pataliputra, as distinct from other cities, with a high degree of urbanity and sophistication, where liberality and etiquette are cherished, and with participation in a civic culture, where arts and sports are cultivated and prized. It is reasonable to conjecture that cities like Pataliputra, affluent, cosmopolitan, and cultured, inspired the ideal of the urban connoisseur in the *Kamasutra*. Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra* is a third-century CE Sanskrit treatise on sexual pleasure. Its protagonist, the *nagaraka* (literally, 'of the city'), is the man-about-town who is 'a sophisticated connoisseur of the good life in general, of pleasure in particular, and of sex even more particularly'.¹⁰ The *Kamasutra* describes his daily routine thus:

8 Manomohan Ghosh (ed. and trans.), *Glimpses of Sexual Life in Nanda-Maurya India: The Caturbhani* (Calcutta: Manisha Granthalaya, 1975), *Ubhayabhisarika*, pp. 5–6.

9 Ghosh (ed. and trans.), *Glimpses of Sexual Life*, pp. 30, 33–34.

10 Vatsyayana Mallanaga *Kama Sutra*, trans. Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 187.

He gets up in the morning, relieves himself, cleans his teeth, applies fragrant oils in small quantities, as well as incense, beeswax and red lac, looks at his face in a mirror, takes some mouthwash and betel, and attends to the things that need to be done. He bathes everyday, has his limbs rubbed with oil every second day, a foam bath every third day, his face shaved every fourth day, and his body hair removed every fifth or tenth day. All of this is done without fail. And he continually cleans the sweat from his armpits.

In the morning and afternoon he eats; . . . After eating he passes the time teaching his parrots and mynah birds to speak; he goes to quail-fights, cock-fights, and ram fights; engages in various arts and games; and passes the time with his libertine, pander and clown. And he takes a nap.

In the late afternoon, he gets dressed up and goes to salons (*goshti*) to amuse himself. And in the evening, there is music and singing. After that, on a bed in a bedroom carefully decorated and perfumed by sweet-smelling incense, he and his friends await the women who are slipping out for a rendezvous with them . . . And when the women arrive, he and his friends greet them with gentle conversation and courtesies that charm the mind and heart. If rain has soaked the clothing of women who have slipped out for a rendezvous in bad weather, he changes their clothes himself, or gets some of his friends to serve them. This is what he does by day and night.

He amuses himself by going to festivals, salons, drinking parties, picnics and group games . . . A salon takes place when people of similar knowledge, intelligence, character, wealth, and age sit together in the house of a courtesan, or in a place of assembly, or in the dwelling place of some man, and engage in appropriate conversation with courtesans. There they exchange thoughts about poems or works of art, and in the course of that they praise brilliant women whom everyone likes . . . They have drinking parties in one another's houses.

Picnics can be described in the same way. Early in the morning, men dress with care and go out on horse-back, attended by servants and accompanied by courtesans. They enjoy the daytime events there and spend the time at cockfights, gambling, theatrical spectacles . . . and then in the afternoon they go back in the same way, taking with them souvenirs of the pleasures of the picnic. And in the same way, in the summer, people enjoy water sports in pools built to keep out crocodiles.¹¹

The urban behavioural ideal thus consisted in cultivation and refinement of every aspect of human personality: body, mind, spirit, senses, and etiquette. Moreover, it did not envisage the *nagaraka* as an isolated instance. He is seen to belong to a like society – ‘people of similar knowledge, intelligence, character, wealth and age’ – in which he circulates and interacts. In housing

¹¹ *Kamasutra*, p. 14.

the man-about-town, then, the city houses an ideal community, in the perspective of the *Kamasutra*, not only ideal individuals, whose twin central concerns, rising above quotidian pursuits, seem to be: sexual attainment and cultural accomplishment.

This seems to be the representation of urban culture in yet another body of Sanskrit literature from the first millennium CE: *kavya* or highly aesthetic and creative poetry, drama, tale, and biography. With their themes and narratives relating single-mindedly to paradigmatic cities of the Second Urbanization, like Pataliputra, Varanasi, Ujjayini, and Shravasti, and mostly composed in that period too, *kavya* texts constitute themselves as pre-eminently urban literature. Therefore their representations may come close to being the self-perception or self-projection of an urban culture, albeit relating to largely elite vantages.

Based on a study of literary representations of the city in this textual genre, it has been argued that the quintessential city in early India was the site of a culture of desire, an ethos centred on the ethic of pleasure.¹² This extended not only to the embracing of a full-blooded materialistic hedonism attested in the literature but also prominently to the pursuit and cultivation of erotic activity. Thus, the city seems always full of beautiful women and men who look like *Kama*, the love god. The women are always in love dalliance or busy preparing for it by enhancing their beauty, and the men flock to the courtesans' quarter or flirt with maids on the highway or in pleasure haunts. Drinking and gambling, music and dance are favourite depicted occupations. The home of all the arts (*sakalakalah dadhanah*), the city is always in festival – sex itself is celebrated as one, while one of the popular festive occasions is the worship of *Kamadeva*, the god of love. Pleasure groves are cherished urban assets frequented in droves. The city is likened to Bhogavati, the *asuric* (demonic) capital, as well as to Amaravati, the heavenly city, both for the pleasures it affords – pleasures that could implicate even the ascetic. For indeed, nuns and monks are routinely shown serving as messengers of love in the city.

Kavya thus seems to present the ancient Indian city as essentially a site for gratification. Is the *kavya* representation to be taken literally or were the texts trying to say something more? For instance, together with the *Kamasutra*, *kavya* seems to render erotics as a form of art rather than instinct – something

12 See Kaul, *Imagining the Urban*, for a full discussion of early urban culture based on literary studies.

that is to be assiduously cultivated by the connoisseur; this then may define the city as a civilizational centre where urges of 'nature' could be tamed and exalted to 'culture'. Moreover, together with the attention to *kama*, or pleasure, we also see in *kavya* a tension between *kama* and *dharmā*, or virtue, a concern for mediating or reconciling the former with the latter. This suggests that it is not a notion of unadulterated gratification that is attributed to the city; there does seem to be a consciousness of socio-moral constraints. But at the same time, the *kama*-centric characterization of the city may show that *kavya* perceives the city as an unstructured social space – not an immoral or amoral world but one that *could* be free, without resorting to rebellion, of the often repressive concerns of religion and society.

This quality, in turn, may be attributed to what appears to be, in *kavya*'s assessment, the attenuated force of any concerted socio-religious authority in the city, like the *brahmanas* or the caste system. Contributing to the diminution in the voice of socio-religious power in the city, and to the unfettering of social behaviour, is the fact that the city is the projected seat of the king, whose power in practice is more coercive than ethical. Also the big merchants in a city like Pataliputra, referred to in the *Mudrarakshasa* as *nagaramukhyah* or *pradhanapurusah*, exerted great influence on the urban socio-political structure. Having access to the king, these men can be expected to have wielded enormous clout either in alliance with him or separately in their own right. The merchant's power being the power of wealth, and the open nature of commerce as a specialization, meant it was another secular factor in the displacement of traditional brahmanical institutions in urban society. In this context it is worth recalling that Buddhist Pali texts, which provide us with our first references to Pataliputra of the sixth century BCE, are replete with references to the great merchants known as *gahapatis* and *setthis*, who seem to have taken to heterodox faiths like Buddhism that emerged as a challenge to the orthodox brahmanical order. We have also noted the considerable vogue that Buddhist and Jaina faiths were in with dynast after dynast on the throne of Magadha.

It has been argued that perhaps the most significant historical factor shaping the urban social order was the concentration of variety in the city. The literary study in question speaks of a vibrant miscellaneous sociological congregation within the paradigmatic city, the impression of a random, crowded, jostling-together of the multiple castes, professions, ethnicities and religious faiths it was possible to find in a city, which yielded a quite unorthodox, heterogeneous texture to the urban social fabric. This is especially plausible for Pataliputra, the metropolis of a sprawling and highly

differentiated empire. Heterogeneity also spelt congestion and intermingling, and a great ideological and behavioural complexity. This, perhaps, lay at the heart of civilization as represented by the ancient imperial city.

The high point of early Indian urban culture reached by a cosmopolis like Pataliputra is believed to have been the post-Mauryan period, that is, between the second century BCE and the third century CE. Thereafter, Magadha came under the sway of the Gupta line of kings. We know this from a reference in the *Vishnu Purana*'s dynastic lists to the Guptas 'enjoying' all the territories along the Ganga including Saketa (Ayodhya), Prayag (Allahabad), and Magadha. Historians believe this would refer to the early Gupta kingdom under the first important king of the dynasty, Chandragupta I (319–335 CE). Chandragupta I seems to have derived some of his power from a matrimonial alliance that Gupta coins suggest he contracted with the Licchavis, who were apparently still an influential ruling group in the foothills of the Himalayas. We do not have specific information on whether or not Pataliputra was his capital. Similarly, though from the Allahabad pillar inscription we know of a vast expansion of Gupta realms across north and central India that took place under his later successor, Samudragupta (350–370 CE), a great war general, we cannot say where his capital was. Under the third king, Chandragupta II (375–415 CE), when the empire spread westwards in a major way, it is likely that Ujjayini in Malwa became the seat of Gupta royal power. Numerous legends link this king with an eponymous king Vikramaditya who populated his court at Ujjayini with luminaries from the world of scholarship.

Gupta kings adopted imperial titles like *paramabhattacharaka* (supreme lord) and *maharajadhiraja* (great king of kings); historians maintain, however, that they did not administer their entire empire directly but established a network of relations of paramountcy through their numerous battles and conquests. They were great patrons of culture and brahmanical religion, particularly the worship of Vishnu, which was in the ascendant since the post-Mauryan centuries; land grant charters attest to their donations to temples and *brahmanas*. Buddhism also continued to flourish, more now in its Mahayana and Vajrayana forms.

It is in the Gupta period that the earliest Chinese monk-traveller to visit the subcontinent, Faxian, arrived and travelled between 405 and 411 CE to many different Buddhist centres in the subcontinent. He left a record of these (*Gaoseng Faxian Zhuan*), which briefly mentions Pataliputra, again in the context of being among the greatest cities and towns in the 'Middle

Kingdom', with prosperous inhabitants who competed with each other in the practice of (the Buddhist virtues of) benevolence and righteousness.¹³ Faxian also refers to an annual procession in Pataliputra where images of the Buddha were carried through the city with much fanfare; it saw the participation, interestingly, of *brahmanas* apart from rich merchants.

Some 55 miles from Pataliputra, the Buddhist monastery at Nalanda achieved great renown as an educational centre in the late Gupta period. A vast complex of stupas and viharas has been unearthed which has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A veritable residential university with a famed, multi-storeyed library (which was burnt down by Turkish invaders in the twelfth century), it attracted scholars and students from various parts of the Buddhist world, including China (notably Tibet), Korea, and Sri Lanka, serving as a site of cross-cultural encounters. Among the subjects taught were grammar, logic, metaphysics, astronomy, and theology. Several big names of the field of ancient South Asian philosophy, like Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu, Dinnaga, Dharmakirti, and Padmasambhava, have been associated with the Nalanda school.

In astronomy and mathematics, mention must be made of Aryabhata, who seems to have migrated to Pataliputra from the Deccan in the fifth century CE and has several firsts to his credit, such as the concept of zero, the decimal, and the pi, and the discovery that the earth rotated on its axis, that there were almost exactly 365.25 days to a year, and how eclipses are caused.

The Gupta Empire declined by the middle of the sixth century CE, battling the rise of various regional rulers and Huna invasions from the north-west. Towards the end of that century, the Pushyabhutis had risen to power, based in Thaneshwar (Punjab). Their most famous king, Harshavardhana (606–644 CE), pushed eastwards and set up his capital at Kanyakubja or Kanauj in the middle Ganga valley, which emerged over the next three centuries as an imperial city in its own right. Magadha was a part of Harsha's dominions which extended up to Gauda (Bengal) at one point. A major source for Harsha's reign is the account (*Si Yu Ki*) left behind by Xuan Zang, the Chinese pilgrim who travelled extensively across the subcontinent and stayed many years at Harsha's court. He seems to have been in close proximity to Harsha, who comes across as a devout patron of Buddhism. The king donated the revenues of two hundred villages for the upkeep of the Nalanda *mahavihara*.

13 James Legge (ed.), *The Travels of Fa Hien: A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms, Being an Account by the Chinese Monk Fa-hien of His Travels in India and Ceylon (AD 399–414) in Search of the Buddhist Books of Discipline* (New Delhi: Master Publishers, 1981), p. 79.

Nalanda continued to receive royal support under the Palas, a dynasty that in the eighth century came to rule over a fairly large territory extending into north and north-east India under Dharmapala (770–810 CE) and Devapala (810–850 CE) but the nucleus of which lay in Bihar and Bengal. Their capital shifted from ruler to ruler, possibly once at Mudgagiri, modern Munger, some 180 miles from Pataliputra. The Palas founded a network of great monasteries (*mahaviharas*), including Vikramashila and Odantapuri in Bihar, which, along with Nalanda, gained great renown as centres of Buddhist learning and education. Pala power had declined by the late ninth century under the strain of constant conflicts for paramountcy with other regional powers. However, it left a striking legacy in the form of a vibrant school of art in Bihar: a large number of sculptures in stone and metal, especially depicting the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other Buddhist deities like Tara, have been recovered.

What became of Pataliputra, the imperial city, after its halcyon days? Archaeology of the early medieval period is virtually non-existent at the site; does literature continue after the Gupta period to record an imprint of Pataliputra's significance and novelty? We know that the city certainly existed at the time al-Biruni, the Persian traveller, visited parts of the subcontinent in the eleventh century. His *Kitab-al-Hind* mentions Pataliputra among other cities of 'India'.¹⁴ However, we also know that already in the seventh century, Xuan Zang, on his visit to the city, had found it fallen on bad days. Zang records in his *Si Yu Ki*: 'To the south of the river Ganges there is an old city about 70 li round. Although it has been long deserted, its foundation walls still survive. Formerly . . . it was called Kusumapura, so called because the palace of the king had many flowers. Afterwards . . . its name was changed to Pataliputra.'¹⁵

One superficial reason for the downturn in Pataliputra's fortunes could be that it ceased to be a capital city, or was at best one of other such capitals under the Guptas and the Palas. But historians have spoken of a general urban decline in the subcontinent from the fourth century CE onwards, consequent on postulated commercial and monetary shrinkage after the high-water mark reached in the early historic period. It has been argued that there was a

14 Qeyamuddin Ahmad (ed.), *India by Al-Biruni, Abridged Edition of Dr. Edward C. Sachau's English Translation* (Delhi: National Book Trust, 1983), p. 96.

15 *Si Yu Ki Buddhist Records of the Western World, Translated from the Chinese of Hsien Tsiang* (AD 629), trans. Samuel Beal, 2 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass [1884] 2004), Book VIII.

corresponding change in the nature and composition of centres of the Second Urbanization, like Pataliputra: fewer merchants and artisans resided there now, more administrators and military men did, and towns were transformed into centres of pilgrimage rather than of production.¹⁶

This hypothecated series of changes can be and has been questioned on several counts. Historians have widely urged qualifying this picture of pervasive urban decay. They suggest visualizing perhaps a partial urban exhaustion for cities of the upper and middle Ganga valley due to persistent and extensive resource use accompanied by the pressure of demographic increase. Others have offered an alternative perspective: they speak of simply a shift in the epicentre of urbanization away from the Ganga valley to other, more regional, contexts (like Bengal and Malwa) that were crystallizing in the early medieval period as the site of new political formations and localized (as opposed to subcontinental) economic patterns.¹⁷ Pataliputra was thus no longer in the thick of things as it had been in the sixth century BCE, and as it had stayed till at least the fifth century CE, as much in popular imagination as on the ground. It did live to fight another day, though, and, in a display of exemplary civilizational continuity, reinvented itself as a provincial centre under Afghan and Mughal rule in and after the fourteenth century, acquiring its modern nomenclature. Patna remains among the largest cities of east India and, once again, a capital city of independent India's state of Bihar.

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17 For details see V. K. Thakur, 'Decline or Diffusion: Constructing the Urban Tradition of North India during the Gupta Period', *The Indian Historical Review* 24 (1997–98): 20–69, and Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, 'Urban Centres in Early Medieval India: An Overview', in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Romila Thapar (eds.), *Situating Indian History for Sarvapalli Gopal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 10–33.

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The Americas

ERICA BEGUN AND JANET BRASHLER

The task of describing the emergence of large and complex political systems and networks of exchange between the period of 1200 BCE and 900 CE in the Americas is daunting and limited by the fact that, with two notable exceptions (the Maya and the Zapotec), there are no written records to inform us. Rather, what we know of emergent complexity and exchange networks during this time period has been developed almost exclusively through the theoretical and methodological lenses of archaeology. As a result, more finite chronological control and interplay between historical documentation and archaeological data are not available to archaeologists working in the Americas. Further complicating any discussion are the many and diverse understandings of what large-scale polities are, not to mention discussions of the nature of the “state,” “civilization,” and perhaps especially, “complexity.” Finally, the issue of continuing debate related to the “best” theoretical approaches for understanding emergent complex systems remains an area of continuing attention and discussion in the archaeology of the Americas as well as other parts of the world.¹

For the purposes of this contribution, we use the somewhat conservative culture history/processual model which employs attributes of complexity that first emerged with unilineal models in the nineteenth century and were subsequently modified by many others including, but not limited to, Colin Renfrew.² Specifically, we examine the archaeological record of the Americas between 1200 BCE and 900 CE with regard to the presence of key attributes, including monumental art/architecture, centralized authority-full

1 Robert W. Preucel and Stephen A. Mrozowski, *Contemporary Archaeology in Theory: The New Pragmatism* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2010), and Jerry Sabloff, “Universal Patterns in the Emergence of Complex Societies,” Santa Fe Institute, Accessed February 24, 2014, www.santafe.edu/templeton/complex-societies/detail/ (2013).

2 A. C. Renfrew, *The Emergence of Civilisation: The Cyclades and the Aegean in The Third Millennium BC* (London: Methuen and Co., 1972).

Table 20.1 A simplified comparative chronological sequence for the Americas

Eastern North America (dates from Neusius and Gross 2014)		Mesoamerica (dates from Evans 2004)			South America (dates from Wenke and Olszewski 2007)	
Mississippian/Fort Ancient	950 CE–Variable (contact)	Postclassic	Late Postclassic	1430–1520 CE	Late Horizon	1476–1532 CE
			Middle Postclassic	1200–1430 CE	Late Intermediate Period	1000–1476 CE
			Early Postclassic	1000–1200 CE		
		Classic	Epiclassic	800–1000 CE	Middle Horizon	600–1000 CE
			Late Classic	600–800 CE		
			Early Classic	300–600 CE	Early Intermediated Period	1–600 CE
Late Woodland	400 CE–950 CE	Preclassic/Formative	Terminal Formative	1–300 CE		
Middle Woodland (Hopewell)	200 BCE–400 CE		Late Formative	300 BCE–1 CE	Early	900/600–1 CE
			Middle Formative	900/800–300 BCE		
Early Woodland	1000–200 BCE		Early Formative	1200–900/800 BCE		
			Initial Formative	2000–1200 BCE		
Archaic	8000–1000 BCE	Archaic	8000–2000 BCE		Late Preceramic Period	3200–2000 BCE

time leadership, craft specialization, recording systems, control of food and labor by elites, the presence of social ranking/hierarchy, dense population, long-distance exchange, and evidence of knowledge or organization that might be considered complex in terms of mathematics, religion/symbolic systems, and astronomy.³

The methodology and evidence we draw on is grounded in archaeology and allied disciplines including, but not limited to, radiocarbon dating, various techniques of trace element analysis and, in the limited case of the Maya, a language preserved largely in stone rather than clay, paper, or parchment. In most cases the few written examples of Mayan and later written documents in Mexico were destroyed, and only within the last several decades have archaeologists and epigraphers succeeded in deciphering these almost lost statements. In South America, Moche ceramics were used as recording systems. In addition, with the emergence of post-processual theoretical approaches and others, including the 'new pragmatism,' oral tradition recording systems and ethnography are increasingly being employed to frame research questions and interpret the rich record of the Americas. Evidence for complexity and exchange in North America is described first, followed by a discussion of Latin America.

Subsistence and adaptation in North America

In 1200 BCE, most people in North America were living an "archaic" lifestyle, with some groups engaging in experiments with horticulture. East of the Great Plains, a suite of native plants, now termed the Eastern Agricultural Complex, including goosefoot (*Chenopodium berlandieri*), sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*), squash/pumpkin (*Cucurbita pepo*), bottle gourd (*Lagenaria siceraria*), little barley (*Hordeum pusillum*), erect knotweed (*Polygonum erectum*), and marsh elder (*Iva annua*), were being cultivated to varying degrees. This region, centered on the Ohio and Mississippi River region, is now recognized as one of ten independent centers of food domestication in the world. By about 2100 BCE, maize was being grown in the southwestern part of North America, and by 1200 BCE, other Latin American domesticates, including cotton and tobacco, were introduced. Initially grafted on to hunter-gatherer subsistence systems in both the southwest and eastern North America, these subsistence strategies form the basis for the development of very different

3 Vere Gordon Childe, *Man Makes Himself* (London: Watts, 1936), and Vere Gordon Childe, *What Happened in History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1942).

trajectories of complexity in both regions, which are explored below. Elsewhere in North America (i.e. the Arctic, Sub-Arctic, portions of the Great Plains, California, and the northeastern Woodlands) many groups retained or modified locally distinctive hunting-and-gathering adaptations that, with the notable exceptions of the Northwest Coast of North America and southwest Florida, continued to function as diverse egalitarian hunter-gatherer groups until European contact.⁴

*Monuments, exchange, and organization
in eastern North America*

Constructing mounds/earthworks (including those made of stone, shell, and earth) began during the Archaic period, perhaps 5,000 years BCE. Mound/earthwork construction implies corporate cooperation, but not necessarily hierarchical organization. Yet, by 1200 BCE, some earthworks achieved a magnitude similar to that found in much later North American groups. Early constructions such as L'Anse Amour in Labrador appear associated primarily with mortuary activity and were likely monuments associated with egalitarian mobile foragers. Between 6000 and 3100 BCE, the pace of construction increased with numerous shell rings and mounds constructed in the mid-continent near the Ohio, Green, and Tennessee rivers and along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and Louisiana. Sites with accumulated debris and middens, some of which were purposefully constructed, have been interpreted as evidence of increasing sedentism, and the development of kin-based corporate groups that may have sponsored construction to achieve status or other community recognition.⁵

Unambiguous earthen mound construction begins around 4500 BCE. Two sites in northeastern Louisiana, Watson Brake dating from approximately 4000 BCE and Poverty Point beginning around 3600 BCE, provide evidence of intentional design and planning, and, in the case of Poverty Point, the movement of extraordinary quantities of soil. At Watson Brake, construction included eleven mounds and a ridge oval that appears to have been the

4 Douglas Price and Gary Feinman, *Images of the Past*, 7th edn. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2012).

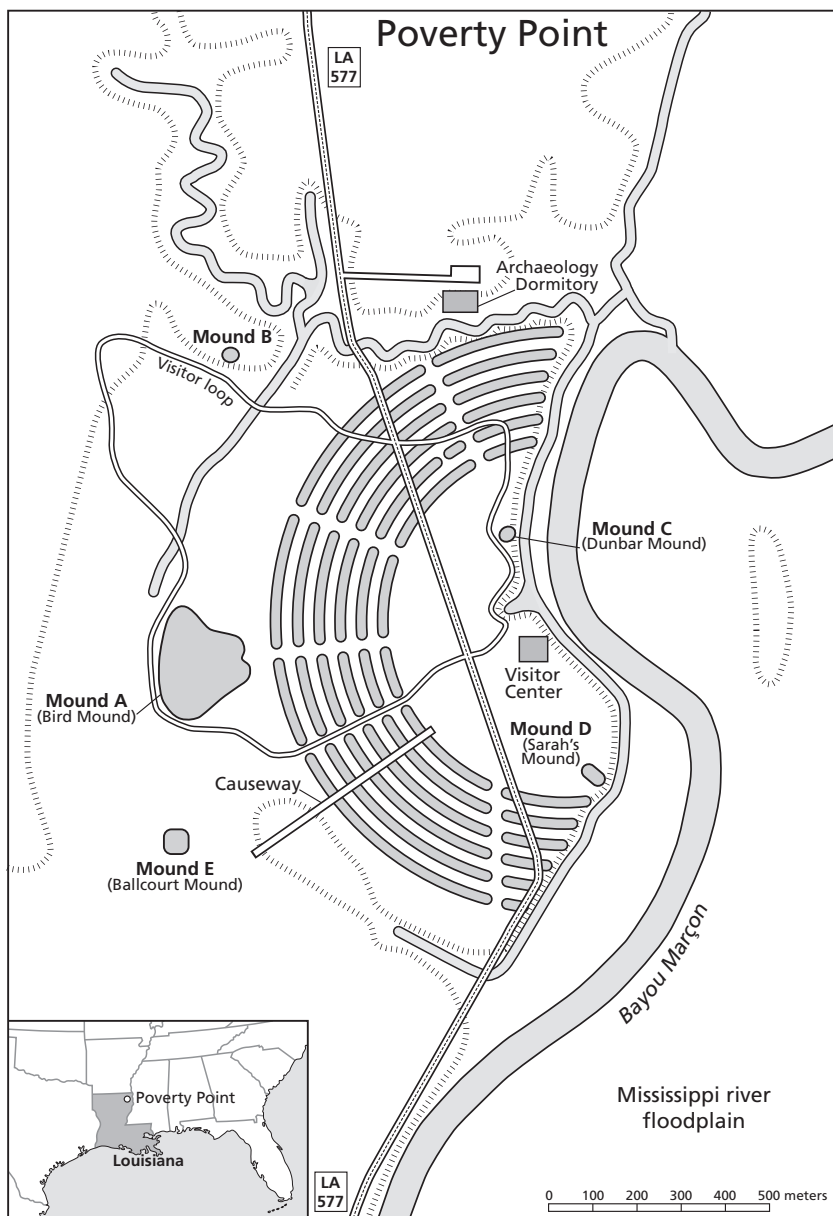
5 George R. Milner, "Mound-Building Societies of the Southern Midwest and Southeast," in Timothy R. Pauketat (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of North American Archaeology* (Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 437–47; Michael Russo, *Archaic Shell Rings of the Southeast U.S. National Historic Landmarks Historic Context* (Tallahassee, FL: Southeast Archeological Center, National Park Service, 2006); and Victor D. Thompson and C. Fred T. Andrus, "Evaluating Mobility, Monumentality, and Feasting at the Sapelo Island Shell Ring Complex," *American Antiquity* 76 (2011): 315–43.

product of several hundred years of seasonal occupations of a most likely egalitarian local population based on the raw materials, food resources, and artifacts recovered.⁶ In comparison, Poverty Point is a massive site characterized as singular and unparalleled in terms of the volume of earth moved, level of planning, and evidence for participation in far-flung raw material exchange.

Poverty Point covers an area of 7.5 km² with a central area enclosed by six concentric ridges and five mounds. Of these, Mound A, 22 meters high with an estimated volume of almost 240,000 cubic meters of earth, is the second-largest earthwork in North America, second only to Monks Mound at Cahokia. In addition to the massive scale of the site is the striking absence of stone, with the exception of lithic materials acquired from anywhere between 50 and 1,000 kilometers away. In addition to imported lithic materials are hundreds of thousands of clay objects, which are not seen outside of the Poverty Point "culture area." Stone imported into the site includes an estimated 70 metric tons of exotic lithic material found in the concentric ridges, high-quality chert from the Illinois and Ohio river valleys, and steatite from southern Appalachia. It is striking, however, that no locally produced materials flow out from the site. Further, despite the volume of material and size of the site, there is no "obvious evidence of social inequality or political differentiation." Though still highly debated, most now conclude that the social structure of residents and those associated with Poverty Point was essentially that of egalitarian hunter-gatherers who collectively constructed the site over several hundred years. Further, the site is seen not as the center of a vast integrated exchange system with outlying communities. Rather, the site is believed to be the "center of a collapsing network that draws into itself through time," which suggests that the magnitude of Poverty Point and its material remains should persuade us to understand that complexity cannot be understood only in terms of subsistence regimes, or socio-political organization, but rather by considering the examples of more difficult to understand complexities including ritual pilgrimage, cosmology, and powerful charismatic leaders (see Map 20.1).⁷

6 Joe W. Saunders, Rolfe D. Mandel, C. Garth Sampson, Charles M. Allen, E. Thurman Allen, Daniel A. Bush, James K. Feathers, Kristen J. Gremillion, C. T. Hallmark, H. Edwin Jackson, Jay K. Johnson, Reza Jones, Roger T. Saucier, Gary L. Stringer, and Malcom F. Vidrine, "Watson Brake, a Middle Archaic Mound Complex in Northeast Louisiana," *American Antiquity* 70 (2005): 631–68.

7 Tristram Kidder, "Poverty Point," in Pauketat (ed.), *Oxford Handbook*, pp. 464–69.



Map 20.1 Poverty Point

By 1200 BCE eastern North American, Late Archaic exchange systems, Poverty Point notwithstanding, most likely functioning through the line of gift giving, were well established in eastern North America. A variety of materials were being exchanged from the Great Lakes (copper) to the Atlantic and Florida Gulf coasts, the sources of marine shell, which was exchanged northward. In addition, a variety of other raw materials, including highly prized cherts, were exchanged locally and regionally across hundreds of kilometers. Most archaeologists have assumed that these patterns of exchange most likely intensified over the following 1,200 years, culminating in the Middle Woodland Hopewellian exchange system. However, recent work calls into question the gradualism model of change with Hopewell developing from its Early Woodland Adena counterpart. Ultimately, Hopewellian Middle Woodland communities reoccupied floodplain environments that appear to have been abandoned and engaged in the movement of a wide range of colorful raw materials from as far west as Wyoming (obsidian) and North Dakota (Knife River chalcedony) to the eastern core areas. Other materials being circulated included copper, marine and freshwater shells, freshwater pearls, mica, pipestone, silver, a variety of high-quality cherts and flint, galena, meteoric iron, and other materials. The exchange of these materials is embedded in a larger context of local and regional social, political, and religious intensification. The most dramatic regional expression is found in Ohio where extensive geometric earthworks at sites such as Newark, Hopewell, Seip, and others where large quantities of the raw materials and finished items were deposited as part of mortuary and other ritual. Recent interpretations based on the structure of sites such as Newark and analyses of mtDNA (mitochondrial DNA) remains of humans interred suggest some of these sites functioned as pilgrimage centers visited by people from outside of the Hopewell Core area in Ohio. Further work by Bolnick suggests that Illinois and Ohio Hopewell populations were interbreeding.⁸

8 Douglas K. Charles, "Origins of the Hopewell Phenomenon," in Pauketat (ed.), *Oxford Handbook*, pp. 471–82; Kidder, "Poverty Point," pp. 464–69; Bradley T. Lepper, "The Newark Earthworks: Monumental Geometry and Astronomy at a Hopewellian Pilgrimage Center," in Richard F. Townsend (eds.), *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: Ancient Indian Art of the Woodlands* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 72–81; Lisa Mills, "Mitochondrial DNA Analysis of the Ohio Hopewell of the Hopewell Mound Group," Ph.D dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Ohio State University, Columbus (2003); Deborah A. Bolnick, "The Genetic Prehistory of Eastern North America: Evidence From Ancient and Modern DNA," Ph.D dissertation, University of California-Davis (2005); and Edwin R. Hajic, *Koster Site Archaeology I: Stratigraphy and Landscape Evolution* (Kampsville, IL: Center for American Archaeology, 1990).

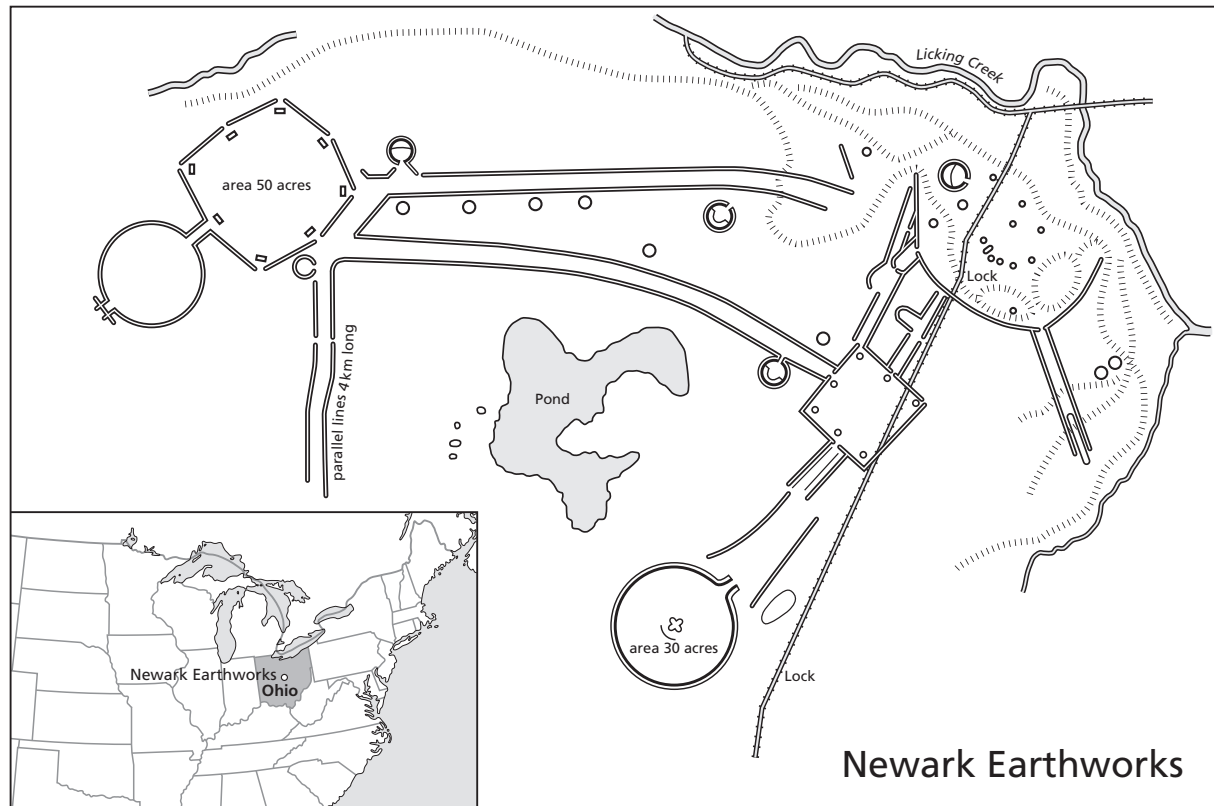
Evidence of careful design and planning of these vast centers is abundant, indicating knowledge of units of standard measurement and astronomy. Sites in the Hopewell core area of Ohio were carefully planned and engineered, utilizing a variety of intentionally selected soils to create sacred spaces and mortuary facilities associated with them. The most spectacular of these is Newark Earthworks, arguably the largest earthwork complex in the world. Newark includes the Great Circle, almost 400 meters in diameter, the Octagon Earthworks and associated circle which together enclose an area of approximately 28 hectares, the Wright Earthworks, and a series of causeways that connect the portions of the site and link it to other Hopewell sites to the south (see Map 20.2).⁹

Artifacts associated with Hopewell/ian sites were manufactured out of various raw materials and no doubt conveyed a variety of meanings (social, religious, and political) which, combined with earthwork construction, reflect a cosmology that is thought to represent historically deep belief and mythology such as the Algonkian earth diver creation story. Elsewhere in the Hopewellian world (Illinois, Great Lakes, the lower Mississippi valley, and other locations), most sites lacked the geometric earthworks, but mound construction followed principles associated with the Hopewell worldview. Artifacts interred in the mounds display additional linkages to the Hopewellian worldview through the types of raw materials, artifact style, and form.¹⁰

Despite the extensive networks of exchange and the construction of large and complex geometric earthworks in the core, Hopewell socio-political organization was most likely characterized by a series of local egalitarian band or tribal communities, including camps and villages with associated mortuary facilities, integrated into larger networks of kin and economic exchange. These larger integrative communities, occupying somewhat larger regions, were ultimately integrated into symbolic communities with shared cosmology, including shared iconography in ceramic style, raw material, and finished artifacts and in some cases shared mortuary practices. The largest and most spectacular of the sites in Ohio can be thought of as paramount integrative communities supported by both local communities and more

9 Ray Hively and Robert Horn, "Geometry and Astronomy in Prehistoric Ohio," *Archaeoastronomy* 4 (1982): S1–S20, and Lepper, "The Newark Earthworks," pp. 72–81.

10 Robert L. Hall, *An Archaeology of the Soul* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1997), and Douglas K. Charles, Julieann Van Nest, and Jane E. Buikstra, "From the Earth: Minerals and Meaning in the Hopewellian World," in Nicole Boivin and Mary Ann Owoc (eds.), *Soils, Stones, and Symbols: Cultural Perceptions of the Mineral World* (London: UCL Press, 2004), pp. 43–70.



Map 20.2 Newark Earthworks

far-flung groups who shared beliefs about the organization of the cosmos and interacted with regard to ritual, material, and kin exchange in multiple ways.¹¹

Absent the fine/r scale chronologies we have today, the disappearance of Hopewell/ian communities around 400 CE was initially characterized as a collapse, but is now seen as a gradual disappearance of the ritual, geometric earth construction, and exchange networks. Local Hopewell/ian communities began to modify as new kinship patterns were established, replacing ritual, social, and economic relationships. Subsistence practices involving the introduction of new cultigens, including maize, intensified in some places, and regional variation intensified mound building while exchange of some kinds of raw materials and finished objects, albeit on a much reduced and transformed manner, continued in the Late Woodland period across the eastern United States.¹²

Once referred to as the good “gray cultures” between the Hopewell and Mississippian zeniths, the Late Woodland period (c. 400–950 CE) in the mid-south and southeast North America is now understood to be the one during which the emergence of politically complex, hierarchical, urban societies associated with the Mississippian period occurs. During this period, maize agriculture became dominant, and mound construction continued and eventually regularly incorporated platform mounds. Platform mounds occurred occasionally in Middle (for example Pinson Mounds in Tennessee) and early Late Woodland contexts before 800 CE. After 800 CE, platform mounds became common on sites and signal substantive changes in social organization and political complexity. Sites indicative of this change include Troyville in Louisiana and Toltec in Arkansas among others. The central and lower Mississippi valleys during the Late Woodland period thus provide evidence for the realignment of society and monument building where communities are no longer tied together through kin, or symbolic and exchange ties. Rather, by 900 CE in this region of North America, transformation of the landscape through monumental building indicates that the stage was set for the communities where hierarchical corporate groups emerged along with evidence for political alliances, warfare, and urbanism

11 Brett Ruby, Christopher Carr, and Douglas K. Charles, “Community Organizations in the Scioto, Mann and Havana Hopewellian Regions: A Comparative Perspective,” in Christopher Carr and D. Troy Case (eds.), *Gathering Hopewell: Society Ritual and Ritual Interaction* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 2005), pp. 119–76.

12 Charles et al., “From the Earth,” pp. 43–70, and Charles, “Origins of the Hopewell Phenomenon,” pp. 471–82.

characteristic of the Mississippian period beginning around 950 CE in the American Bottom.¹³

*Emergent complexity and exchange systems
in the North American southwest*

At 1200 BCE, the North American Southwest, like other regions of the continent, was characterized by relatively small-scale “archaic” societies. However, unlike other areas of North America, by this time most groups in the southwest were familiar with maize and squash, which were introduced from Mesoamerica perhaps before 2100 BCE. The introduction of maize from Mesoamerica was but the first step of long and continuous interaction and exchange between the American Southwest and Mesoamerica.

Maize and squash were initially grafted on to subsistence strategies characterized by gathering plants supplemented by hunting by egalitarian groups whose populations had begun to grow and who were experiencing reduced mobility. By the end of the Archaic period, some time around 200 BCE, groups were still somewhat mobile, but moving less frequently. Unlike in the Middle East, where sedentism appears to have preceded domestication, the first farmers in southwestern North America retained their mobile settlement strategies until some time after the second century CE when the material remains and architecture of sites suggest the development of village occupation throughout the year. Villages were characterized by semi-subterranean pithouse construction. Between 200 and 500 CE, the first ritual structures suggestive of larger corporate group activity known as kivas appear. By 500 CE there is evidence of population increase throughout the region, and in two areas in particular: the Sonoran Desert region of southern Arizona and the Four Corners region (the intersections of southwestern Colorado, southeastern Utah, northeastern Arizona, and northwestern New Mexico).¹⁴

13 Robert C. Mainfort, “Middle Woodland Ceremonialism at Pinson Mounds, Tennessee,” *American Antiquity* 53 (1998): 158–73; Mark A. Rees, “Monumental Landscape and Community in the Southern Lower Mississippi Valley during the Late Woodland and Mississippi Periods,” in Pauketat (ed.), *Oxford Handbook*, pp. 483–96; Stephen Williams and Jeffrey P. Brain (eds.), *Philip Phillips, Lower Mississippi Survey, 1940–1970* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 404; Owen Lindauer and John H. Blitz, “Higher Ground: The Archaeology of North American Platform Mounds,” *Journal of Archaeological Research* 5 (1997): 169–207; George R. Milner, *The Moundbuilders: Ancient Peoples of Eastern North America* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 2004); and Thomas E. Emerson, “Cahokia Interaction and Ethnogenesis in the Northern Midcontinent,” in Pauketat (ed.), *Oxford Handbook*, pp. 398–409.

14 Stephen Plog, *Ancient Peoples of the American Southwest* (New York: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1997); Barbara J. Mills, “The Archaeology of the Greater Southwest: Migration,

Beginning around 500 CE in the Tucson and Phoenix region of Arizona, pithouse structure clusters are organized around plazas with adjacent ceremonial structures. These sites are associated with the archaeological Hohokam groups who by 500 CE were constructing irrigation canals which, between 1100 and 1450 CE, provided water for between 20,000 and 40,000 hectares of land watered by over 600 to 800 kilometers of canals, supporting a population of perhaps between 20,000 and 100,000 people. Between 700 and 1150 CE, other attributes including communities organized around central plazas, Mesoamerican-derived earthen ball courts, craft production of ritual and other objects and iconography appear in the Hohokam region. Perhaps the best known of Hohokam sites is Snaketown, situated strategically near the intersection of the Salt and Gila rivers, a position to control exchange between the two major drainages in the southern southwest region. Exchange within the Hohokam region, including the Mimbres area of southern New Mexico, increased along with increased exchange with western Mexico for marine shell, copper, and other materials. However, little evidence exists of hierarchical ranking during the period of time before 1150 CE, making it difficult to understand the social and political dimensions of Hohokam society. The Hohokam never achieved the kind of complexity characterized by state-level societies to the south and represents an unusual example of a "middle range irrigation society."¹⁵

Beginning around 500 CE in the Four Corners, Colorado Plateau region, some pithouse community residents begin excavating larger circular structures, which are thought by archaeologists to be ceremonial kiva structures, although the exact nature of their ritual function is not well understood for this time period. By the late eighth century CE, semi-sedentary pithouse communities give way to large aggregated villages characteristic of the Ancestral Pueblo. Villages are constructed above ground, but residential mobility remains high with abandonment of villages and valleys and the dispersal to different regions of the plateau by 900 CE. The significant exception to this is Chaco Canyon in the San Juan Basin of northwestern New Mexico. Here, by 850 CE, a series of "great houses," pueblo communities characterized by numerous rooms and kivas, including one "great kiva,"

Inequality and Religious Transformations," in Pauketat (ed.), *Oxford Handbook*, pp. 547–60; and Lisa Young, "Diversity in First-Millennium AD Southwestern Farming Communities," in Pauketat (ed.), *Oxford Handbook*, pp. 561–70.

- 15 Suzanna K. Fish and Paul R. Fish, "Hohokam Society and Water Management," in Pauketat (ed.), *Oxford Handbook*, p. 570; Plog, *Ancient Peoples*, p. 113; and Mills, "The Archaeology of the Greater Southwest," pp. 547–60.

were constructed at Pueblo Bonito, Una Vida, and Peñasco Blanco. Astronomical and cardinal directions governed the orientation of these and subsequent communities, and eventually they were linked to each other through a system of roads constructed across the landscape, crosscutting landforms with the intention of following a cardinal or astronomical direction. Eventually, Chaco emerged as a region controlled by powerful elites who manipulated the exchange of turquoise over 2,000 kilometers to Mesoamerica and the distribution of Mesoamerican goods including marine shell, scarlet macaw bird feathers, and copper to other regions of southwestern North America. The power and control in evidence at Chaco are demonstrated by high-status burials with retainers, great houses, and the regional control exerted by Chaco in the period following 900 CE.¹⁶

Only within the last fifteen years or so have archaeologists working in southwest North America seriously considered the evidence for elites and hierarchy in many areas of the region including the Hohokam, Chaco, and Casas Grandes and the implications of that evidence for understanding issues of power, authority, and complexity. Most now recognize that these were not egalitarian societies, but societies where power may have been derived from a variety of socio-political, religious, or economic strategies employed by elites. In any case, a more thorough discussion of emergent complexity, power, and exchange in the North American Southwest occurs in a time frame beyond the scope of this chapter.¹⁷

We now turn to consideration of the development of complex socio-political phenomena and exchange systems in the southern half of the Americas. While there remains a high degree of uncertainty about the classification of complex societies present in North America into official “state”-level civilizations, the states and complex civilizations that emerged in ancient Mesoamerica are far less ambiguous. Beginning with the Olmec and nascent Zapotec states during the Formative/Preclassic period, there is a successive progression of state rise and collapse in the region until the arrival of Europeans in the fifteenth century. During this time, a number of complex state-level civilizations emerged, both independently and as a result of complicated interregional interactions which, at times, spanned the length and breadth of much of Mexico and northern Central America.

¹⁶ Young, “Diversity in First-Millennium AD Southwestern Farming Communities,” pp. 561–70, and Chapter 21 by Lekson, in this volume.

¹⁷ Mills, “The Archaeology of the Greater Southwest,” p. 554.

Mesoamerica

While a detailed analysis of state formation is beyond the scope of this chapter, we have sought to provide here a brief overview of the major developments of the Mesoamerican peoples during the time periods ranging from the emergence of complexity in the Preclassic/Formative (~3,500 BCE – 100 BCE) through the collapse of the subsequent Classic period civilizations between 650–900 CE. It is during these periods that some of the most intriguing changes and developments in the region occurred, setting the stage for the eventual rise of complex empires, such as those of the Mexica of the Central Highlands and the Tarascans of Michoacán.

Mesoamerican society revolved around the growth and consumption of three primary crops: maize (*Zea mays*), beans (e.g. *Phaseolus vulgaris*), and squash (*Cucurbit sp.*) These three plant crops support one another and can be grown in close proximity in addition to providing all of the essential vitamins and nutrients needed for human survival. Maize, in particular, played a vital role in the development and expansion of Mesoamerican civilizations.

The Mesoamerican Preclassic: interregional trade and emergent complexity

Mesoamericanists define the Preclassic as the period of complexity that followed the emergence of permanent settlements and agricultural practices, but preceded the large-scale states of the Classic period. It is during this time that the early emergence of complex, state-like societies can be first identified. While it was once believed that the Olmec culture of the Gulf Coast region served as a primogenitor for much of the subsequent complexity and cultural development throughout Mesoamerica, more recent work in the Valley of Oaxaca has given rise to evidence that supports a much broader development of complexity, which is likely the result of interregional trade networks and intercultural relations that spurred growth in both the Olmec region and that of the Zapotecs of Oaxaca.

The Olmec: the origin of Mesoamerican cultural practices

The Olmec are perhaps best recognized for their stone head monuments, which have been discovered at most of their major ceremonial centers in the Gulf Coast region. These monuments, which are made from single, massive blocks of basalt that were transported great distances, seem to represent important figures, possibly chiefs or leaders, who may have presided over

the sites. They serve as clear evidence for the presence of elites with the ability to organize and control the movement of such a resource over great distances.

According to many Mesoamericanists, the Olmec represent one of the first recognizable cultural horizons to emerge in the region. Although their classification as a full-fledged, state-level civilization is controversial, the lasting impact the Olmec culture appears to have had on the later societies and civilizations in the region is undeniable. These impacts are visible in many aspects of pan-Mesoamerican life-ways and culture and have led many to see the Olmec as a “Mother Culture” phenomenon in the region. Conversely, there are those who see the Olmec has having had a lesser impact on other Mesoamerican societies and consider it to be more of a “Sister Culture” to the other Preclassic cultures of Mesoamerica.¹⁸

Despite this debate, which often centers on the emergence and presence of a widespread Olmec art style, the Olmec were an influential presence in the Preclassic Mesoamerican landscape in a number of key ways. These include the foundations of the first interregional trade networks, the first appearance of the Mesoamerican calendar system, early evidence for pan-Mesoamerican deities/figures and bloodletting rituals, and the origins of the Mesoamerican ball game. All of these are seen as clear evidence for increased social complexity in the region and, indeed, may have served to spur many other parts of Mesoamerica toward increasing complexity or been the result of the Olmec’s interactions with these other regions.

While the foundations and early period of Olmec presence in the region pre-dates 1200 BCE by about 1500 years, the height of the Olmec civilization seems to range from 1400–400 BCE. During this period we see a shifting of

¹⁸ David Grove, “Olmec Archaeology: A Half Century of Research and Its Accomplishments,” *Journal of World Prehistory* 11 (1997): 51–101; Michael D. Coe, “The Olmec Style and Its Distribution,” in Robert Wauchoppe (ed.), *Handbook of the Middle American Indians* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), pp. 739–75; Michael D. Coe and Richard A. Diehl, “Olmec Archaeology,” in Michael Coe, *The Olmec World: Ritual and Rulership* (Princeton University, 1995), pp. 11–25; Michael D. Coe and Rex Koontz, *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2008); Arthur A. Demarest, “The Olmec and the Rise of Civilization in Eastern Mesoamerica,” in Robert J. Sharer and David C. Grove (eds.), *Regional Perspectives on the Olmec* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 303–44; Kent V. Flannery and Joyce Marcus, *Early Formative Pottery of the Valley of Oaxaca, Mexico* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1994), pp. 385–90; Kent V. Flannery and Joyce Marcus, *Zapotec Civilization* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996), p. 120; David Grove, “Olmec: What’s in a Name?” in Sharer and Grove (eds.), *Regional Perspectives*, pp. 8–14; and Norman Hammond, “Cultura Hermana: Reappraising the Olmec,” *Quarterly Review of Archaeology* 9 (1989): 1–4.

power within the Veracruz region among a series of powerful ceremonial centers which seem to have successively dominated the region. The earliest of these regional powers was the site of San Lorenzo.

Located on the Rio Chiquito, the site of San Lorenzo reached its peak from 1200–900 BCE and serves as the first major Olmec cultural horizon within the regional sequence. Built on a hilltop, San Lorenzo represents the first significant administrative center in Mexico. In addition to at least ten colossal Olmec Heads, the site was dominated by several monumental structures that appear to have been built specifically for ceremonial or administrative purposes. Both serve as clear evidence for a socially stratified society. The reason for San Lorenzo's decline remains ambiguous, but by 900 BCE, power and populations had shifted away from the site.¹⁹

La Venta, located on the Tonala River in the southeastern part of the Olmec Heartland (that area with the most direct Olmec evidence and influence) rose to dominance following the decline at San Lorenzo. This site dominated the area from around 900–400 BCE and offers an interesting view into the ritual lives of the Olmec people.

Valley of Oaxaca: trade networks and martial power

The earliest evidence for extensive trade networks and the role they played in early state development in Mesoamerica can be seen in the interregional interactions between the Olmec Heartland of the Gulf Coast and the nascent Zapotec state forming in the Valley of Oaxaca during the Preclassic period. While there is debate over whether these Preclassic period societies achieved true statehood, it is understood that it was through control over long-distance trade networks linking the Gulf Coast and Oaxaca that both regions emerged as key players of the Preclassic Mesoamerican landscape.

At this time, trade between the regions seemed to revolve around the movement of raw goods, such as shell and feathers, out of the Olmec region to the Valley of Oaxaca (see below), with finished products and some raw materials from the Valley of Oaxaca returning to the Gulf Coast. One trade good that seemed highly prized in the Olmec Heartland came in the form of small iron-ore “mirrors” that are commonly found in elite Olmec contexts and have their production and origins in the Valley of Oaxaca. Through this trade network, the Olmec elites had access to prestige goods from Oaxaca,

19 Coe and Koontz, *Mexico*, and Richard E. W. Adams, *Prehistoric Mesoamerica* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005).

which, in exchange, benefited from the prestige of being able to trade with the Olmec.²⁰

In the Valley of Oaxaca, we see clear evidence for increasing cultural complexity during the Preclassic/Formative period. While it was originally believed that this complexity resulted from the trade relations the people of Oaxaca had with their Olmec neighbors, it now seems likely that both cultures emerged independently of one another, but influenced each other through such interactions.

The site of San Jose Mogote has yielded some of the best evidence for the presence of a strong, martial elite. Located in the northern arm of the Valley of Oaxaca, San Jose Mogote served as one of the more powerful sites during the Preclassic period. Evidence at the site in the form of figures carved into blocks of basalt stone, known collectively as the *Danzantes*, suggests that conflict and martial power were both commonplace and intensifying at this time. The figures themselves, once believed to be ritual dancers, seem to actually depict dismembered and mutilated captives. Many of them contain early forms of the Zapotec blood glyph, lending credence to this interpretation along with pushing back evidence for non-Olmec writing systems during this period.

Central Mexico: the origins of Teotihuacan

During the Late Formative/Preclassic period (400 BCE – 100 CE), the Basin of Mexico saw the emergence of two major sites that vied for control over the region. During this period, Teotihuacan controlled the northern part of the Basin of Mexico through access to the key obsidian sources in the region (Sierra de las Navajas/Pachuca and the Otumba source). Meanwhile, Cuicuilco, located in the southern part of the Basin of Mexico, rose to power because it controlled the trade routes in and out of the southern part of the region. This control over the southern part of the Basin of Mexico lasted until the Tzacualli phase (100–200 CE) when Cuicuilco began to decline due, at least in part, to the growing economic power of Teotihuacan. This decline continued until Cuicuilco was eventually destroyed by a volcanic eruption, at which point the population center of the Basin shifted northeast to the Teotihuacan Valley. By 250–300 CE, Teotihuacan dominated the Basin of Mexico and controlled trade of obsidian from the Basin of Mexico sources via routes throughout

20 Susan Toby Evans, *Ancient Mexico and Central America* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004), p. 149.

the greater Mesoamerican region, ranging as far away as highland Guatemala.²¹

By the end of the Preclassic period at Teotihuacan, there is evidence of a systematic consolidation of population into the urban center. The leadership of the city (whose identity is still unknown) seems to have ordered the razing of those buildings that were previously present and had the city rebuilt on its present orientation, along with many of the other major structures found in the core of the city. Cowgill further suggests that the nature of the building projects at this time suggests the tantalizing possibility of the presence of what he describes as “a strong, very skilled, ambitious, and probably charismatic person with good rhetorical skills” who may have taken over leadership of the political structure of the city. While some of the evidence suggests the presence of such a leader, it is hardly conclusive. Current work by Sergio Gómez seeks to discover the tombs of these early leaders under the Temple of Quetzalcoatl in the Ciudadela region of the city. Following this realignment of the city, the majority of the populace moved into apartment compounds within the city, which were built along the city’s grid pattern. This pattern of occupation continued through the remainder of the Teotihuacan sequence until the city’s eventual collapse and subsequent depopulation around the year 650 CE.²²

*The Classic period: urban centers
and long-distance trade networks*

The Classic period (100–900 CE) of the Mesoamerican cultural sequence delineates a time of increasing complexity and widespread cultural interactions between vastly different groups of people. It is during this time when the widespread nature of long-distance trading networks comes to the fore as a source of power and success within the broader Mesoamerican context. During this period, we see the first evidence for urbanization in the Basin of Mexico with the city of Teotihuacan emerging as the first and largest urban center in the Americas at the time. Along with many of these economic

21 George Cowgill, “A Speculative History of Teotihuacan,” paper presented at the Fifth Round Table on Teotihuacan at the Mexican National Institute of Anthropology and History, October 23–28, 2011; Evans, *Ancient Mexico and Central America*; Ester Pasztory, *Teotihuacan: An Experiment in Living* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), p. 43; and Michael Spence, “Obsidian Production and the State in Teotihuacan,” *American Antiquity* 46 (1981): 769–88.

22 Cowgill, “A Speculative History of Teotihuacan,” pp. 3–4, and Evans, *Ancient Mexico and Central America*.

changes, we see the emergence of large, complex states throughout the region.

The cultural and political landscape of the Classic period is rife with complex interactions that span vast distances, unaided by large domesticated animals as a source of labor or transportation. Trade between the major civilizations at this time spurred growth in many of the regions where state-level development came to pass. Chief among these were Teotihuacan in the Basin of Mexico, the Classic Maya polities of Belize, Honduras, Guatemala, and the Peten region of Mexico, as well as the Zapotec city of Monte Alban in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Central Mexico: Teotihuacan

The true extent of Teotihuacan's influence and presence throughout the region is still not fully understood, but it is likely that the city had a much wider impact than presently believed. While this presence and influence does appear to be widespread throughout Mesoamerica, it seems to be of an economic nature, rather than one of conquest. Indeed, much of the power held by the city of Teotihuacan was based on the continued control the city had over a key source of green obsidian found at the Sierra de Navajas, commonly known as the Pachuca obsidian source, in Hidalgo, Mexico. While obsidian is found throughout much of the Greater Mesoamerica region, the obsidian from the Pachuca source was prized for both its high quality and its green-gold color. Obsidian from this source has been found as far away as Guatemala to the south and Oklahoma to the north. This obsidian was the foundation for much of the Classic period long-distance trade for which Teotihuacan seems to have been a central hub.²³

At its peak, Teotihuacan actively controlled trade in the Basin of Mexico and had spread its long-distance trade networks throughout the greater Mesoamerica region. These trade networks supported a Teotihuacan presence in Oaxaca, the Gulf Coast, and the Maya region, with many of these regions having an active presence at Teotihuacan in return. Interactions between the Zapotecs of Oaxaca and the Maya of both the Gulf Coast and Highland Maya region were complex and are still not fully understood. Contact, likely through trade, is also in evidence in Michoacán, West Mexico, and northward into Chihuahua.

23 Alex W. Barker, Craig E. Skinner, M. Steven Shackley, Michael D. Glascock, and J. Daniel Rogers, "Mesoamerican Origin for an Obsidian Scraper from the Precolumbian Southeastern United States," *American Antiquity* 67 (2002): 103–108, and Spence, "Obsidian Production and the State in Teotihuacan."



Figure 20.1 Temple of the Sun, Teotihuacan, Pyramid, Mexico, over 70 meters high, world's largest pyramid, Aztec temple built 100 CE (Tom Till / Alamy)

At its peak, it is estimated that 125,000–150,000 people lived within the 20 km² city. In addition to the apartment compounds, Teotihuacan contained hundreds of ceremonial buildings, with a high concentration of public and monumental architecture located along the major north–south axis of the city, known in modern times as the Street of the Dead. It is along this north–south axis of the city that many of the major architectural structures of Teotihuacan were built. These include the early ceremonial center known as the Ciudadela (located at the southern end of the 2.2 kilometer Street of the Dead), the Pyramid of the Sun, and the Pyramid of the Moon with its associated temple and palace complexes. The Pyramid of the Sun represents one of the most elaborate building events at Teotihuacan. Containing an estimated 1.76 million cubic meters of soil, this rubble-filled structure is one of the largest preindustrial engineering feats in the Americas (see Fig. 20.1).²⁴

24 René Millon, *Urbanization at Teotihuacan, Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), vol. 1, part 1; René Millon, "Teotihuacan Studies: From 1950 to 1990 and Beyond," in Janet C. Berlo (ed.), *Art, Ideology, and the City of Teotihuacan* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1992), p. 344; Spence, "Obsidian Production and the State in Teotihuacan," 769; George Cowgill, "State and Society at Teotihuacan, Mexico," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 133; Evans, *Ancient Mexico and Central America*;

Unfortunately, the political structure of Teotihuacan is not easy to determine due, in part, to the absence of royal tombs within the city. Recent work by Mexican archaeologist Sergio Gomez has attempted to locate potential royal tombs under the major temple structure within the Ciudadela complex, but the results of these explorations are still incomplete. While no royal tombs have been reported, there is a clear elite presence within the city, with proximity to the central core being a marker of social, and presumably economic, standing within the city. The Teotihuacan state seems to have at least partially controlled the settlement patterns within the city, establishing a complex and rigid grid pattern, which is oriented on an axis set 15.5° east of true north. Those apartment complexes that are closer to the core show higher degrees of internal decoration (murals) and increased prestige goods in burial contexts. The source of wealth for many of the elites was through long-distance trade and state control over the production of goods within the city.

While no evidence of ball courts at Teotihuacan exists, there is some limited indication that the people of Teotihuacan had adopted the basic 260-day Mesoamerican calendar system. In addition, a limited glyphic system exists, which has not been fully deciphered. Further evidence, found at Monte Alban and in parts of the Maya region, suggests an iconic manner in which the people of Teotihuacan were being depicted by their neighbors, including the use of butterfly imagery and the depiction of atlatl-like spear throwers. It is through these faraway images that the presence of Teotihuacan in these regions has had its strongest support. Research has suggested that there may have been marriage ties between people of Teotihuacan affiliation and some of the ruling dynasties of Monte Alban (Zapotec) and Copan (Maya).²⁵

Highland Maya: the city-states of Central America

The Classic Maya civilization rose to power between 300 and 900 CE in the southern highlands of Mexico's Peten region, Belize, Honduras, and Guatemala. Unlike Teotihuacan, which was a centralized city-state with

and Emily McClung de Tapia and Luis Barba Pingarrón, "Ciencias aplicadas al estudio de estructuras monumentales en Teotihuacan, Mexico," accessed February 25, 2014, www.saa.org/Portals/0/SAA/Publications/amantiq/articleMcLung.pdf (2011).

- 25 Cowgill, "State and Society," 143; Titiana Proskouriakoff, *Maya History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993); Clemency Coggins, "The Age of Teotihuacan and Its Mission Abroad," in Kathleen Berrin and Ester Pasztory (eds.), *Teotihuacan: City of the Gods* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), pp. 140–55; and Evans, *Ancient Mexico and Central America*.

limited evidence for a clearly defined leader, the Classic Maya civilization comprised many sovereign city-states (and their hinterlands) which were connected through a complex network of political conquest and alliance led by divine kings. The power and lives of these high-ranking elites are clearly outlined and recorded on carved stone monuments, known as stelae. These monuments, carved by master craftspeople, were created at the behest of the ruling elite as a means of propaganda as the elite class sought to immortalize conquest, alliance, marriage, and many other details of their lives in stone. Furthermore, given the durability of these monuments, they survived the passage of time and the Spanish missionaries' textual purges of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As such, it is through these monuments that much of the textual evidence for the Classic Maya civilization has been gleaned.

While it was once believed that the Classic period Maya civilization was a peaceful society dominated by an intellectual class of scholars, philosophers, and mathematicians, modern views of the Classic period Maya people paint a very different picture. The Maya civilization was rife with complex political interactions between the various city-states, with royal leaders engaging in a complicated dance of political alliance, warfare, ritual, and death. City-states were organized around advanced ceremonial centers with a low degree of urbanization. Occupants of these centers were usually members of the ruling elite class and their immediate retainers and support networks. The overwhelming majority of the Maya populace lived in small, rural villages, which in turn served and supported the local elites living at these centers. The ceremonial centers are dominated by massive public and ceremonial architecture in the form of temples, pyramids, and palaces where the ruling class lived and worked. Rulers of these city-states established themselves as divine leaders, inextricably linking those who ruled to the complicated world of the Maya cosmology through blood sacrifice and complex ritual guided by a complex calendar system.

Mesoamerican calendar systems

While the Mesoamerican calendric system can be traced to the Olmec, it is the later adaptations and uses of this system that are best known. The Mesoamerican people possessed a detailed and intricate calendric system comprising two interconnected calendar cycles. The first of these calendars, called the *Ha'ab* by the Maya, is regarded as a solar calendar due to its 365-day count. These days are sorted into twenty-day months, of which there are eighteen, with five "unlucky" days, known as the *Wayeb*, accounting for the

Table 20.2 Chart showing the units of the Maya Long Count calendar system

Days	Unit	Long Count unit
1	1 K'in	1 K'in
20	20 K'in	1 Winal
360	18 Winal	1 Tun
7,200	20 Tun	1 K'atun
144,000	20 K'atun	1 B'ak'tun

annual cycle. The second calendar, referred to as the *Tzolk'in* by the Maya, measures a 260-day cycle. These days are split into twenty “months” consisting of only thirteen days each. When the calendars are viewed together, they provide a unique day designation based on the cycle of interlocking points that repeat once every fifty-two years, known collectively as the Calendar Round.

While the fifty-two-year cycle served for most of the ancient civilizations of Mexico, the Maya sought to expand their record of time beyond this. To this effect, they created what is known as the Long Count Calendar (see Table 20.2). While the Long Count system was based upon the cycle of the Calendar round, it expanded the divisions of time beyond the fifty-two-year cycle by creating new divisions for the segmenting of time. Grounded in the Maya base-twenty counting system, days were bundled into groupings of twenty that could be counted both forward and backward, allowing the Maya an unlimited record of the passage of time. This was due, in part, to their use of a “null” equivalent to the modern concept of “zero,” which served as a place holder in the long count date system.

The Classic period collapse

Starting between c. 600 and 650 CE, problems and instability began to emerge in the Basin of Mexico. It is believed that this instability was a feedback result of Teotihuacan's monopoly over Pachuca obsidian. As trade networks expanded, costs for procurement of the green-gold obsidian at the far reaches of Teotihuacan's networks caused people to seek out other sources of green obsidian, which were relatively cheaper to utilize. As a result, new sources of green obsidian were sought, including sources in the Maya region and Michoacán, and Teotihuacan's monopolistic control over the obsidian trade was shattered. This in turn resulted in a collapse of the Teotihuacan trade system, which served to destabilize the state as a whole.

Around 650 CE, this instability resulted in the downfall of Teotihuacan. As trade routes shrank, the lower-ranked elites of the city suffered cutbacks and losses not felt by the upper elites. As a result of growing unrest among their ranks, the lower elites rose up and destroyed much of the core of the city through selective burning of the temples and major palaces along the Street of the Dead. Following this, the core of the city was abandoned and never reoccupied, although occupation of the outskirts of the city has never ceased.

Until recently, the complexity of the Maya collapse was not fully understood. It is now believed that the “collapse” of the Classic Maya civilization was less a single event, and more a series of small-scale, regional collapses, which created a domino effect that served to destabilize the entire region until the civilization ceased to function at the state level anymore. Among the major causes for these collapses were famine and political unrest resulting from drought, environmental destruction, intensification of warfare between rival city-states, and population pressures from the collapse of Teotihuacan. Combined, these factors served to bring the Classic Maya civilization to its knees.

Coe points out that between 790 and 830 CE, Maya cities were failing at an alarming rate. By 889 CE, he reports the number of sites recording the ending date of the 10.2.0.0.0 *k'atun* had fallen to five. January 15, 910 CE, found on a monument at the site of Itzimte, represents the last recorded date at any of the Classic Maya sites. While the populations and power in the Maya region shifted north into the Yucatan, Maya civilization as a whole never reached the social, political, or innovative heights experienced in the highlands states of the Classic period.²⁶

The regional collapses at the end of the Classic period ultimately paved the way for a series of powerful states to rise and fall throughout the Greater Mesoamerica region. The Toltecs set up a small state near Teotihuacan, in the Tula region, which sought to capture some of the previous city's glory. The fall of the Toltec state around 1200 CE, in turn, gave way to the eventual emergence of the notorious Aztec Empire in the fourteenth century CE.²⁷

South America

It is difficult to classify the entire continent of South America as one region. Like North America during Pre-contact times, South America was home to a

²⁶ Michael D. Coe, *The Maya* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2005), p. 162.

²⁷ Evans, *Ancient Mexico and Central America*.

wide variety of cultures and peoples. Of these, very few show clear evidence for state development. This region is best known for the development of the Inca Empire during the Late Horizon period (1476–1432 CE).²⁸ However, this empire represents only the last of the complex societies that emerged in the Andean region. While the early period of development for this region is not as well understood, evidence for early complexity seems to date to sometime around 3000 BCE with the emergence of stratification at sites such as Kotosh in the highlands, along with Caral and El Paraíso, among others, in the coastal region. These sites established the precedence for the flourishing and increasing complexity that, ultimately, gave rise to the Inca state following the collapse of the Tiwaunaku and Huari states at the end of the Middle Horizon (600–1000 CE).

Formative period (3200–900/600 BCE)

The first clear evidence for the initial rise in socio-political complexity in South America seems to come from the coastal regions of Ecuador and Peru. It is believed that populations in these regions were supported by extensive marine resources, which were supplemented by a shift to agrarian practices with the appearance of maize agriculture sometime between 5000 and 1500 BCE. This early shift to sedentary communities and the increasing resources available to the populations of the coastal region ultimately resulted in the development of monumental architecture during the Formative period (3200–900/600 BCE). This is often split into a Preceramic (3200–2000 BCE) period and the Initial period (1800–900/600 BCE).²⁹

Preceramic development

Much of the discussion regarding complexity in the Preceramic period revolves around the presence of public and monumental architecture, which predates the appearance of ceramic technology in the region. The Andean region is interesting in that extensive monumental architectural undertakings pre-date the appearance of ceramic traditions. By 3000 BCE, a number of coastal Andean sites show evidence for public architecture in the form of mounds and “temple” structures. These buildings, often in the form

28 Robert J. Wenke and Deborah I. Olszewski, *The Past in Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

29 Danièle Lavallée, *The First South Americans*, trans. Paul Bahn (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000); Michael Moseley, *The Maritime Foundations of Andean Civilizations* (Menlo Park, CA: Cummings, 1975); Deborah Pearsall and Dolores Piperno, “Antiquity of Maize Cultivation in Ecuador: Summary and Re-evaluation of the Evidence,” *American Antiquity* 55 (1990): 324–61; and Wenke and Olszewski, *Past in Perspective*, p. 541.

of terraced platforms, represent communal ritual space and a high degree of social organization of labor. One of these early sites with public and monumental architecture is the Peruvian site of Caral, which has been dated to between 2627 and 2020.³⁰

In addition, there is evidence for social stratification in housing and burial ritual that dates to this early period. Two of the key sites from this region are the coastal site of El Paraíso and the highland site of Kotosh. El Paraíso has been cited as the oldest evidence for such architecture in the region, despite the recent destruction of one of the pyramid mounds by construction companies. Both sites hold clues to a widespread cultural complex that guided the building and orientation of such structures, along with tantalizing evidence for ritual activity (especially at the site of Kotosh in the highlands). It has been suggested that the major function of the architectural monuments of the Late Preceramic period may have revolved around communal ritual enactment. Much of this architecture included open areas, such as plazas, in which community gatherings and activities could have occurred.³¹

Long-distance trade played an important role in the various societies of the Preceramic period. Trade networks stretched up and down the coast of Peru and Ecuador, in addition to those that linked the coastal region to the highland. Obsidian and other raw materials seem to have moved from the highlands into the coastal region, along with some highland domesticates, such as potatoes. In return, the coastal region sent marine shells, fish, and other maritime resources into the highlands. Burger also notes that salt may have served as an important trade item for the people of the coastal regions, with evidence suggesting that the production of salt may have occurred during the Late Preceramic period.³²

Burger also points out that there is limited evidence for craft specialization during the Late Preceramic period, nor is there overwhelming evidence for clear markers of social status objects (such as earplugs, which become

30 Tom Dillehay, Duccio Bonavia, and Peter Kaulicke, "The First Settlers," in Helaine Silverman (ed.), *Andean Archaeology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 16–34; Winifred Creamer and Jonathan Haas, "The Late Archaic in Andean Prehistory: 3000–1800 B.C.," in Silverman, (ed.), *Andean Archaeology*, pp. 35–50; Jonathan Haas and Winifred Creamer, "Crucible of Andean Civilization: The Peruvian Coast from 3000 to 1800 B.C.," *Current Anthropology* 47 (2006): 745–75; Ruth Shady Solis, Jonathan Haas, and Winifred Creamer, "Dating Caral, a Preceramic Site in the Supe Valley on the Central Coast of Peru," *Science* 292 (2001): 723–26; and Richard Burger, *Chavín and the Origin of Andean Culture* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995).

31 Dillehay et al., "The First Settlers," pp. 16–34; Creamer and Haas, "The Late Archaic in Andean Prehistory: 3000–1800 B.C.," pp. 35–50; James B. Richardson III, *People of the Andes* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Books, 1994); and Burger, *Chavín*.

32 Burger, *Chavín*, p. 32.

important markers of male status in later times). However, there is evidence for a complex textile industry. These textiles were usually made from cotton fibers through a weaving process called twining rather than through the use of warp and weft weaving. These textiles often depict motifs and imagery that represent precursors to the later motifs of the Chavín culture, strengthening the evidence for long-term cultural continuity in the region.³³

The Norte Chico culture

According to Haas and Creamer, the Norte Chico region of the Supe valley shows the earliest evidence for a dramatic shift in cultural and social complexity. During what they refer to as the Late Archaic period (3100–2900 BCE), this region experienced a significant shift in social patterns, which ultimately gave rise to the earliest evidence for public architecture.³⁴

El Paraíso shows some of the earliest evidence for public, monumental architecture in the Andean region. Architecture at this site includes rectangular earthen mounds that have an orientation of 25° east of north. These mound structures serve as precursors to many of the Chavín U-shaped temples and mounds from the Initial phase. Indeed, the site of Chavín de Huantar itself possesses these early mounds suggesting a high degree of site, and likely cultural, continuity between these early settlements and the emergence of increasingly complex settlements during later times.³⁵

While the coastal regions of Ecuador and Peru were supported by the bounty of the Pacific Ocean with supplemental agricultural practices eventually emerging, the highland region depended on domestication as early as 5000 BCE. By 3000 BCE, it is believed that the majority of important domesticates used by the people of the highlands were available. Among these domesticates were maize (which was more suited to the valley floors), potatoes, *oca*, *ullucu*, *quinoa*, guinea pigs, and native camelids.³⁶

The first clear evidence for architectural development in the highlands was found at the site of Kotosh. Other highland sites have been subsequently discovered. These sites all consist of similar architecture and site layout. The general plan for these sites includes “free-standing buildings with central stone-lined firepits,” which have either a rectangular floor plan with rounded

33 Richardson III, *People of the Andes*, and Burger, *Chavín*, p. 34.

34 Haas and Creamer, “Crucible of Andean Civilization,” 745–75.

35 Creamer and Haas, “The Late Archaic in Andean Prehistory,” pp. 35–50; Burger, *Chavín*; and Jeffery Quilter, “Architecture and Chronology at El Paraíso, Peru,” *Journal of Field Archaeology* 12 (1985): 279–97.

36 Burger, *Chavín*, p. 32.

corners or are round and were used for community ritual purposes involving the burning of offerings in the building's chambers. This regionally practiced religious complex combining sacred architecture with ritual enactment has been referred to as the Kotosh Religious Tradition. Burger points out that there are differences in the construction of these ceremonial buildings, but likens them to the Kiva complexes of the North American Southwest in that, while the exact dimensions, materials, and placements of the structures vary between sites, the ritual and social significance did not.³⁷

Initial period

Around 2000 BCE, pottery and ceramic technology appeared in the Peruvian coastal and highland regions. Archaeological evidence suggests that ceramic technology had been present in parts of Ecuador for nearly a millennium at this point. It is unclear, however, as to why it had not been adopted by the Peruvian societies, despite evidence for trade networks and other points of contact between the regions during the Peruvian Preceramic period. With this shift to ceramic technology, and possibly as a point of explanation for the appearance of ceramics, the coastal societies of Peru seem to have shifted away from maritime resources to a heavier reliance on agrarian production around the same time.³⁸

There was a dramatic increase in the complexity of public architecture in the coastal region at this time. Burger notes a number of sites where U-shaped pyramid mounds appeared. This monument complex is made up of terraced platform mounds that make up three sides of a plaza. While the middle mound is usually the largest, there seems to be little consistency in the sizes of the flanking mound or between sites. What is consistent is the openness of the fourth side of the plaza, which faces the middle mound, in addition to the open space between at least one of the flanking mounds and the central mound. These mound complexes are usually oriented to "between 13° and 64° east of true north."³⁹

Chavín: the first Andean state?

The first clear evidence for a widespread state presence in the Andean region can be found at the site of Chavín de Huantar. This site, which has its origins

37 Creamer and Haas, "The Late Archaic in Andean Prehistory," pp. 35–50, and Burger, *Chavín*, pp. 45–46.

38 Burger, *Chavín*.

39 Leon C. Williams, "Complejos pirámides con plaza en U, patrón arquitectónica de la costa central," *Revista del Museo Nacional* 41 (1980): 98, and Burger, *Chavín*, p. 61.

in the Preceramic period, rose to dominance between around 800 and 500 BCE.⁴⁰ Archaeological evidence suggests that Chavín de Huantar started as a ceremonial center before emerging as the core of a nascent state during the Initial period. Evidence for the widespread Chavín presence is most clearly demonstrated through regional presence of artistic styles including complex iconography that has been interpreted as representing a widespread belief system. Among the characteristic iconography is that of a humanoid jaguar figure which appears throughout the region, both in stone and on finely crafted prestige goods, such as textiles and gold.⁴¹

The site itself comprises a central, U-shaped plaza with associated religious buildings in the form of flat-topped pyramid structures. It is the presence of these pyramids that has served as a connection between the culture of Chavín de Huantar and the Preceramic period to which many of the early ones have been dated. As the site rose in importance, there was extensive building and expansion of the ceremonial core of the site, and the site itself shifted from ceremonial in nature to being occupied by a wider population.

Evidence suggests that instability during the Early Horizon period, between 400–200 BCE, resulted in the decline of both the site of Chavín de Huantar and the larger Chavín region.

First Horizon: Moche

Following the dissolution of the Chavín Horizon (c. 250 BCE), a number of small, regional states emerged throughout the Andean region. Many of these were situated along the small river valleys dotting the coastline. Among these were the Moche and the Nazca cultures, the latter being made famous by their linear and zoomorphic designs in the desert. Evidence during this period clearly shows a high degree of socio-political complexity, particularly among the Moche. Despite this, there is some disagreement as to whether the Moche civilization represents an aggressive, expansionary chiefdom or a true state.⁴²

Despite a lack of written records, the Moche culture of the First Horizon period (200 BCE – 600 CE) is among the best understood of the early state-level civilizations in the region. This is, to a great extent, due to the detailed record of Moche life represented on Moche ceramics, which are famous – perhaps infamous – for their detailed depictions of almost all aspects of life in Moche times, including hunting, warfare, weaving, and sexuality. As a

40 Danièle Lavallée, *The First South Americans*, trans. Paul Bahn, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000.

41 Burger, *Chavin*.

42 Anthony Aveni, "The Nazca Lines: Patterns in the Desert," *Archaeology* 39 (1986): 32–39.

result of this pictographic record system, much is known about life in Moche culture that is unknown for similar societies. It is from this pottery record that archaeologists have been able to decipher important ritual elements from Moche society, such as the "Sacrifice Ceremony" in which an important figure is depicted receiving a chalice from a subordinate figure and is often accompanied by depictions of human sacrifice ritual.⁴³

As with other coastal societies, the Moche civilization relied heavily on the natural marine resources provided by the Pacific Ocean. In addition, agricultural innovations allowed the people of the Moche region to successfully farm what small amounts of irrigable land they could. This, in turn, supported a growing population.

The discovery of Sipán in 1987 shifted the debate over the classification of the Moche culture. Prior to this, the Moche were seen by many as a complex chiefdom with a highly aggressive expansionary policy. The Royal Tombs of Sipán have been used to suggest that a much higher level of power may have been held by the Mochica rulers, demonstrated through the extensive grave goods (including precious metals such as gold) and the inclusion of human sacrifices in the tombs.⁴⁴

Non-Andean complexity

Much of the discussion of complexity in South America revolves around the development of complex states in the Andean region. While it is true that early state formation first appears in this region, it is by no means the only region of the continent where complexity emerged. While no other state-level development occurred in South America, work throughout the Amazonian region has revealed complex chiefdom-level societies. Evidence for mound building is reported at a number of sites, including "Llanos de Mojos in the Bolivian Amazon, the uplands of the Ecuadorian Amazon, Marajo Island at the Mouth of the Amazon, the coastal plain of the Guianas, and the Middle Orinoco." Mounds at these sites are often 3–10 meters tall, and the sites themselves represent a significant occupation presence with clear evidence for craft specialization.⁴⁵

While it was once suggested that this development was the result of interactions with or invasion from the Andean region, Roosevelt supports

43 Douglas Price and Gary Feinman, *Images of the Past*, 6th edn. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010).

44 Price and Feinman, *Images of the Past*, 6th edn.

45 Anna Roosevelt, "The Rise and Fall of the Amazon Chiefdoms," *L'Homme* 33 (1993): 259 and 273.

the idea that the shift to chiefdoms in Amazonia may have been a local phenomenon, not the result of outside influences.⁴⁶

Conclusion

While the chronology of this chapter does not include the period between 900 and 1500 CE, we can say that the cultures of groups occupying the areas we have described continued to transform and in some cases, such as the Toltec, Aztec, and Inca, become large urban states and empires. In other areas, such as southeastern and southwestern North America, the emergent complexity and exchange systems observed are impacted by a number of factors including climate change. While it is often tempting to compare the trajectories of the civilizations of the Americas to those of Afro-Eurasia, such a perspective generally fails to acknowledge the splendor of the indigenous states of the Americas. The archaeological record throughout the Americas supports the idea of independent state development in all three of the major geographical regions of the hemisphere.

Furthermore, one can clearly see state-level civilizations emerge in the Americas as a result of indigenous processes similar to those that spurred similar cultural development in Africa, Europe, and Asia, but with important differences that resulted in the formation of unique cultures. Ultimately, with the conquest of the Americas by the superior technology and disease pathogens of Europeans, the trajectories of these societies were cut short, leaving us able only to speculate as to what diverse and remarkable cultural forms would have emerged given their foundations, which we have attempted to characterize here.

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46 Anna Roosevelt, "The Rise and Fall of the Amazon Chiefdoms," *L'Homme* 33 (1993): 255–83.

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Regional study: Chaco Canyon and the US Southwest

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Chaco Canyon in northwestern New Mexico, with its monumental eleventh–twelfth-century CE “Great Houses,” is one of the most famous archaeological sites in the US Southwest. Chaco is one of three UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the region, the others being the thirteenth-century cliff-dwellings of Mesa Verde in Colorado and the Indian Pueblo of Taos, a living village in northern New Mexico. (A fourth “southwest” World Heritage cultural site, Paquimé in Chihuahua, Mexico, will be discussed below.)

In the Southwest, ancient ruins and Native villages blend seamlessly. Adolph Bandelier’s pioneering explorations in the late nineteenth century more or less defined Southwestern archaeology. He was instructed by his mentor, Lewis Henry Morgan (“the father of American anthropology”), that “the facts of American archaeology must be studied ethnographically: i.e., from the institutions, usages, and mode of life of the existing Indian tribes.”¹ That is: understand the ancient past by direct reference to the Pueblo Indian present. That strategy underwrote Southwestern archaeology for over a century, and underwrites much of our thinking today.

Connections between ruins and Pueblos are reinforced by current heritage concerns of modern Pueblo Indians. Themes of continuity and changelessness run through almost every account of the Pueblos, whose institutions, usages, and modes of life are often said to date to Time Immemorial. Pueblo traditional histories, in contrast, are all about movement, migration, and change. For the last five centuries, however, Pueblo Indians maintained highly traditional communities in small towns (or “pueblos”), Native enclaves within Spanish, Mexican, and American states and empires. Archaeology (and Pueblo traditional histories) tells us that modern Pueblo societies developed

1 Lewis Henry Morgan, “A Study of the Houses of the American Aborigines, in Don D. Fowler, *A Laboratory for Anthropology: Science and Romanticism in the American Southwest, 1846–1930* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), p. 177.

from a very different past, after the fall of Chaco and Mesa Verde; that is, after 1300 CE.

To be sure, the forty or so modern Pueblo Indian towns (from Hopi, Arizona, on the west to Taos, New Mexico, on the east) are descendant communities of most, but perhaps not all, of the people who built the cliff-dwellings and Chaco. Very likely, not all of the people who built Chaco and – more importantly – not all of their social and political institutions, usages, and modes of life survive in modern Pueblos. The history of the ancient Southwest was as much about change as continuity. Chaco may be the most important site in Pueblo Indian prehistory: a transformative episode that clearly was NOT “Pueblo” in its social and political organization, but which served as a historical “cause” of modern Pueblos, when Pueblo peoples consciously rejected the Mesoamerican-inspired hierarchies and governments of Chaco and developed the egalitarian, communal, ritually based societies seen today at Taos, Hopi, and other Pueblos.

Chaco, although its history falls slightly earlier than the period covered by this volume, serves well as a case study of world history in ancient North America. The ancient societies of North America were densely interconnected in ways that shaped history – a New World history. North American archaeology, however, was founded on the idea that Native societies north of Mexico were simple, isolated, and essentially history-less. Those notions reflected eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonial and racist biases, painting North American Natives as “savages” unworthy of their continent. While contemporary American archaeology is anything but colonial or racist – absolutely, it is not! – those inherited foundational principles continue to define the intellectual “space” in which archaeology is conducted. It is assumed, *a priori*, that even the most elaborate North American societies were “intermediate” – far short of “states” with formalized, institutional governments.²

Reconnecting Chaco and the ancient Southwest with its contemporary world – specifically, Mesoamerica – re-situates the region on a continent awash with states and empires. Chaco demonstrates the critical need for such a reconfiguration. Other obvious Southwestern examples include Hohokam and Paquimé. Hohokam was the non-Pueblo civilization of southern Arizona, contemporary with and in many ways more impressive

2 Stephen H. Lekson, “The Good Gray Intermediate: Why Native Societies North of Mexico Can’t Be States,” in Susan Alt (ed.), *Ancient Complexities* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010), pp. 177–82.

than Chaco.³ Hohokam clearly referenced the civilizations of western Mexico, to a degree that many archaeologists see a direct intrusion of west Mexican peoples as stimulus to Hohokam's rise, starting around 700 CE – an explosive event that, in its turn, may have precipitated the rise of Chaco. (Hohokam built without stone; thus, their ruins are flattened and unimpressive, and their history remains largely untold by national parks, coffee-table books, or educational media.) Fourteenth-century Paquimé was the Southwest's last and greatest city, with "I"-shaped Mesoamerican ball courts, small "pyramids," and a plethora of Mesoamerican references and connections. We shall meet Paquimé again, below, as a possible heir of Chaco.

The US Southwest and Mexico

The Southwest is a well-known region – and a major cultural heritage theme– within the United States, comprising the states of New Mexico, Arizona, and the southern portions of Colorado and Utah. As a cultural and archaeological region, the Southwest is partly an accident of history and partly a deliberate colonial creation – and, of course, partly real. History first: US President Polk's ambitions to expand his country to the Pacific Coast triggered a war with Mexico (1846–1848). The United States won, and Mexico's *Noroeste* became the USA's Southwest. An influx of Americans followed, colonizing the new territories. By the late nineteenth century, transplanted Americans came to appreciate the tourism potential of the Southwest's Hispanic and Native societies. In a spectacular natural landscape, old Hispanic villages and older Indian Pueblos appealed to Americans as an exotic "foreign country" tucked safely within the national boundaries. In the early 1900s, a small cabal of community leaders, archaeologists, journalists, and artists – mostly in Santa Fe and Taos – created and marketed a highly romanticized Southwest. It worked: tourism became an enormous economic force in the region.

Archaeological ruins were an important part of the package. American armies noticed ruins during the Mexican War. Local legends ascribed them to the Aztecs: the northern Aztlan homelands from which Aztecs began their march south to empire. Initial newspaper descriptions of the new Southwest accepted that view: the ruins were Aztec. The mysterious cliff-dwellings of

3 Suzanne K. Fish and Paul R. Fish (eds.), *The Hohokam Millennium* (Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007).

Mesa Verde, revealed to the world in the late nineteenth century, fueled speculation about a lost race – probably Aztecs. New towns and counties were named Aztec, Toltec, and Montezuma.

Adolph Bandelier (the region's first archaeologist, met briefly above) directly addressed the Aztec question and concluded that the Southwest's ruins were antecedent to Pueblo Indian peoples; they had no connection with the glories of old Mexico.⁴ Southwest prehistory was presented as fundamentally local, with a slow, steady (Bandelier said "tedious") progression from hunter-gatherers accepting, at many removes, a diffused maize agriculture and (perhaps) pottery from the south, then evolving in-place to become the simple, isolated farming societies of the modern Pueblos. That progression was codified in 1927 at a field conference held at the ruins of Pecos Pueblo. The new master chronology was called "the Pecos System": a series of numbered, additive stages from pre-pottery Basketmaker I, II, and III continuing through Pueblo I, II, III, IV, and V – "Pueblo V" being the modern Pueblos. At each stage, another element of modern Pueblo life was added (maize, pottery, pueblos, kivas, kachinas, etc.), until, by 1450 CE, Pueblos emerged more or less as encountered by the Spanish conquistadors and American anthropologists. The region's agricultural staples and economic base – maize, beans, squash – surely came from Mexico, but they arrived, by this account, without significant cultural baggage. Thus, the Southwest's ancient history was effectively nationalized by the war of conquest, colonial commercialization, and early archaeology.

The ancient Southwest, we felt, should remain local, within the national jurisdiction. With more excavations, Southwestern ruins revealed evidence for contacts and influences from the south, but these were minimized. Carl Sauer, the great Berkeley cultural geographer, wondered about all this:

The notion of the independence and isolation of Southwest Culture would not have arisen, it seems to me, if, historically, Mexico had been the center from which anthropological studies had spread into North America. Scholars, coming into the Southwest from the North, have realized that they were getting into something strongly different, and yet their curiosity stopped at the International Border, and they have failed to see how much of this complex has, even in ancient times, moved into the Southwest from the South. Indeed, notions about the origins of Southwest Culture originated

4 Adolph F. Bandelier, *Final Report of Investigations Among the Indians of the Southwestern United States, Carried on Mainly in the Years from 1880 to 1885, Part I-II* (Cambridge, MA: J. Wilson and Son, 1890–92).

in the years when it was considered proper to infer endemism as dominant in cultural studies, to maximize development in situ, and minimize the significance of dispersal and diffusion. A familiar example is the [Pecos System's] postulated succession of stages from Basketmaker I to Pueblo V, all of this construed as the product of autochthonous "evolution."⁵

Sauer was correct: the Southwest was, historically, the northwestern frontier of Mesoamerica. But, as discussed further below, the Southwest was, to a degree, geographically distinct, much as the Intermediate Zone on the southern fringes of Mesoamerica differed from the civilization's core. Spanish colonial exploration established the Southwest as something of an island or isolate of Neolithic civilization spatially remote from its mother cultures in Mesoamerica. The Southwest's last and greatest city, Paquimé in Chihuahua (of which, more below), was 600 km north of Mesoamerica's northernmost city, Culiacán in Sinaloa (of which, more below). When the Spanish arrived, that 600 km gap was populated by nomadic or "uncivilized" (that is, non-urban) tribes. In the Southwest they found "pueblos" – settled agricultural towns. Thus, there is a glimmer of validity to its regional distinction – the Southwest was, in part, real – an isolated frontier.

A carefully managed provincialism reinforced early anthropology's bedrock assumptions that all North American Native societies – including Southwestern Pueblos – were, and always had been, simple and "intermediate." A panel of distinguished archaeologists considered the ancient Pueblo Southwest and concluded "we can't even pretend [they] formed states."⁶ For many decades, the ruins of the Southwest – the cliff-dwellings, Chaco Canyon, and hundreds of others preserved in national and state parks – have been interpreted as early versions of modern Pueblos: simple, egalitarian, and communal.

Chaco was not that. Chaco was a "state" – a secondary state, a local version of a Mesoamerican polity. It failed. Around 1300 CE, Pueblo people rejected Chaco's political structure. They made a conscious, historical decision to be simple, egalitarian, and communal. Pueblo people never again built – or allowed – anything like Chaco.

5 Carl Sauer, "Comments on Paul Kirschoff's Gatherers and Farmers in the Greater Southwest," *American Anthropologist* 56 (1964): 553–56.

6 Norman Yoffee, Suzanne K. Fish, and George R. Milner, "Communities, Ritualities, Chiefdoms: Social Evolution in the American Southwest and Southeast," in Jill Neitzel (ed.), *Great Towns and Regional Politics* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), p. 262.

Archaeology at Chaco Canyon

Some terminology: “Anasazi” is an archaeological term, anglicized from a Navajo phrase, for the ancient peoples of the Four Corners region in New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, and Arizona. For many decades, technical and popular writing used “Anasazi”; I use it here in its archaeological sense. Many archaeologists and Natives prefer “Ancestral Pueblo,” with its implication of Pueblo cultural affiliation. While there can be no question that modern Pueblos are descendent communities of Chacoan societies, the equation may not be so simple: Navajo people (unrelated to Pueblos) know a lot about Chaco, and (as suggested above) key elements of Chaco are not represented in modern Pueblos, except as traditions and histories.

Chaco’s apogee was “the Bonito phase,” dating from about 850 to 1150 CE, named after the canyon’s largest ruin, Pueblo Bonito (of which, more below). Pueblo Bonito is the iconic, archetypical “Great House,” huge masonry buildings with hundred of rooms standing four or five stories tall, which constitute Chaco’s principal interest. Great Houses stand in contrast with normal family homes of their times, the small “unit pueblos” consisting of a pit structure backed by a few small above-ground rooms. (Family homes of Chaco’s time were remarkably modular, thus “unit pueblo.”)

Without Great Houses, there would be no Chaco Culture National Park, no “Chaco Phenomenon,” no almost fetishistic archaeological interest in Chaco Canyon. I use “Chaco” for the archaeological phenomenon which occurred in Chaco Canyon, and for the “regional system” which extended far beyond the canyon itself.

Archaeologists have excavated at Chaco Canyon for more than a century. Richard Wetherill, the cowboy-archaeologist who discovered Mesa Verde, initiated excavations at Chaco in 1896, at its marquee site of Pueblo Bonito. His was the first of several major field projects sponsored by a variety of institutions: the American Museum of Natural History (with Wetherill) at Pueblo Bonito (1896–1900), the Smithsonian Institution and National Geographic Society at Pueblo Bonito and Pueblo del Arroyo (1921–1927), the Museum of New Mexico and the University of New Mexico at Chetro Ketl (1920–1934), and the National Park Service (NPS) at Kin Kletso (1950–1951). The last major field program, the NPS’s Chaco Project, worked at Chaco from 1971 to 1982. And now Chacoan archaeology has come full circle: in 2005–2006, the University of New Mexico reopened old National

Geographic Society trenches in front of Pueblo Bonito, in the “Chaco Stratigraphy Project” – a re-analysis already producing significant results.

Lots of archaeology has been done at Chaco. That investment of time, money, energy, and brains returned remarkable results, multiplied by several factors: aridity and superb preservation; surface visibility, with scant plant cover and little later superimposition; tree-ring dating (Chaco, with tens of thousands of precise tree-ring dates, may be the best-dated prehistoric site in the world); and a short, simple sequence (compared with Troy or Tenochtitlan). Doing archaeology at Chaco is relatively easy, and many excellent archaeologists worked there over a long time. With all that high-quality work at an advantageous site, we should know a lot about Chaco. We do.

Chaco Canyon

Chaco Canyon is at latitude 36° north, longitude 108° west, in northwestern New Mexico. At Pueblo Bonito, the elevation is about 1,865 m (6,125 ft). The heart of the canyon is a 12-km-long stretch with the intermittent Chaco Wash running from east-southeast to west-northwest. The north side of the canyon has towering sandstone cliffs topped by wide “slick rock” terraces; the south side is less dramatic. The canyon is near the center of the San Juan Basin, a vast geological depression that takes in most of northwestern New Mexico and adjacent portions of Colorado. Archaeology borrowed that name from geology and refashioned it to define a region about 100 km in radius around Chaco, comprising the Chaco River drainage and nearby portions of the San Juan River, into which the Chaco flows – when it flows (see Map 21.1).

The very largest Great Houses were concentrated in a 2-km-diameter “downtown” zone at the center of Chaco Canyon. These include Pueblo Bonito (described below), Pueblo Alto, Chetro Ketl, Pueblo del Arroyo, Kin Kletso, and many other monuments and smaller structures. Architecture extends beyond this central zone to what has been called the “Chaco Halo,” an oval area with a maximum radius from Pueblo Bonito of about 8.5 to 10 km beyond the confines of the canyon. Beyond the Chaco Halo lay the boundaries of the San Juan Basin, often considered Chaco’s inner core – a radius around Pueblo Bonito of about 70 km. The scale of Chaco’s world was even larger, however, extending over much of the Four Corners region, as far as 150 km from Chaco Canyon.

Chaco Canyon’s environment was harsh – a description overused in Southwestern archaeology but singularly applicable here. Summers are blisteringly hot; winters are wretchedly cold. The growing season is short, and



Map 21.1 Chaco Canyon region

rainfall uncertain. Indeed, water for basic domestic needs is (and was) a concern. The canyon contained little wood for building or burning, and no outstanding local resources besides sandstone and low-grade coal (which was not used). The canyon was a poor place to farm, only marginally better than the surrounding desert; much or most maize (the staple crop, along with beans and squash) was imported from better-watered areas around the edge of the San Juan Basin.⁷ How and why did Chaco's spectacular Bonito phase

⁷ Larry Benson, Linda Cordell, Kirk Vincent, Howard Taylor, John Stein, G. Lang Farmer, and Kiyoto Futa, "Ancient Maize from Chacoan Great Houses: Where Was It Grown?" *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 100 (2003): 13111–15.

flourish in this desert canyon, when well-watered valleys lay empty to the north and south, closer to mountains and forests? Clearly, part of the answers to those questions must be sought outside the canyon itself, in the larger region of which Chaco was the center.

The Bonito phase, in and beyond Chaco Canyon

Chaco Canyon is not a single “site”; indeed, there are several hundred prehistoric ruins in the national park. In barren Chaco, early archaeology couldn’t see the forest for all those trees. Pueblo Bonito (see Fig. 21.1) and Chetro Ketl were considered separate sites; but those Great Houses and many other sites in the canyon constituted a single urban or near-urban settlement. Chaco’s “city-scape” was composed of a number of different types or classes of structures and monuments, ranging from huge “Great Houses” to modest family homes (technically, “unit pueblos”), as well as “roads,” Great Kivas, mounds, platforms, waterworks, and other building types. This section briefly reviews these forms, and then discusses their larger setting: the urban center at Chaco and its larger region.

The archaeology of Chaco Canyon centers on a dozen remarkable buildings called “Great Houses.” Great Houses at Chaco began in the late ninth century as monumentally up-scaled versions of regular domestic structures, “unit pueblos” – the small, single-family home or, more prosaically, “small sites.” Early Great Houses were unquestionably residences: *Great Houses*. It is important to remember that Great Houses began, and continued, as residences – a key fact obscured by the addition of monumental masses of non-domestic architecture, as Great Houses developed over the next three centuries.

In Chaco’s region, there were scores of unit pueblos for every Great House. The differences were unmistakable. An entire unit pueblo, compressed to its floor area, would fit in a large room at a Chaco Great House. Unit pueblos – homes of the people – and Great Houses – elite residences – constitute one of the clearest examples of stratified housing in archaeology, Minoan in its clarity. In Mesoamerican terms, Great Houses were the palaces of noble families; unit pueblos were the farmsteads of commoners. Those terms seem untoward for North America, which we have long been told was always simple and “intermediate”; but palaces, nobles, and commoners almost certainly accurately describe Chaco.

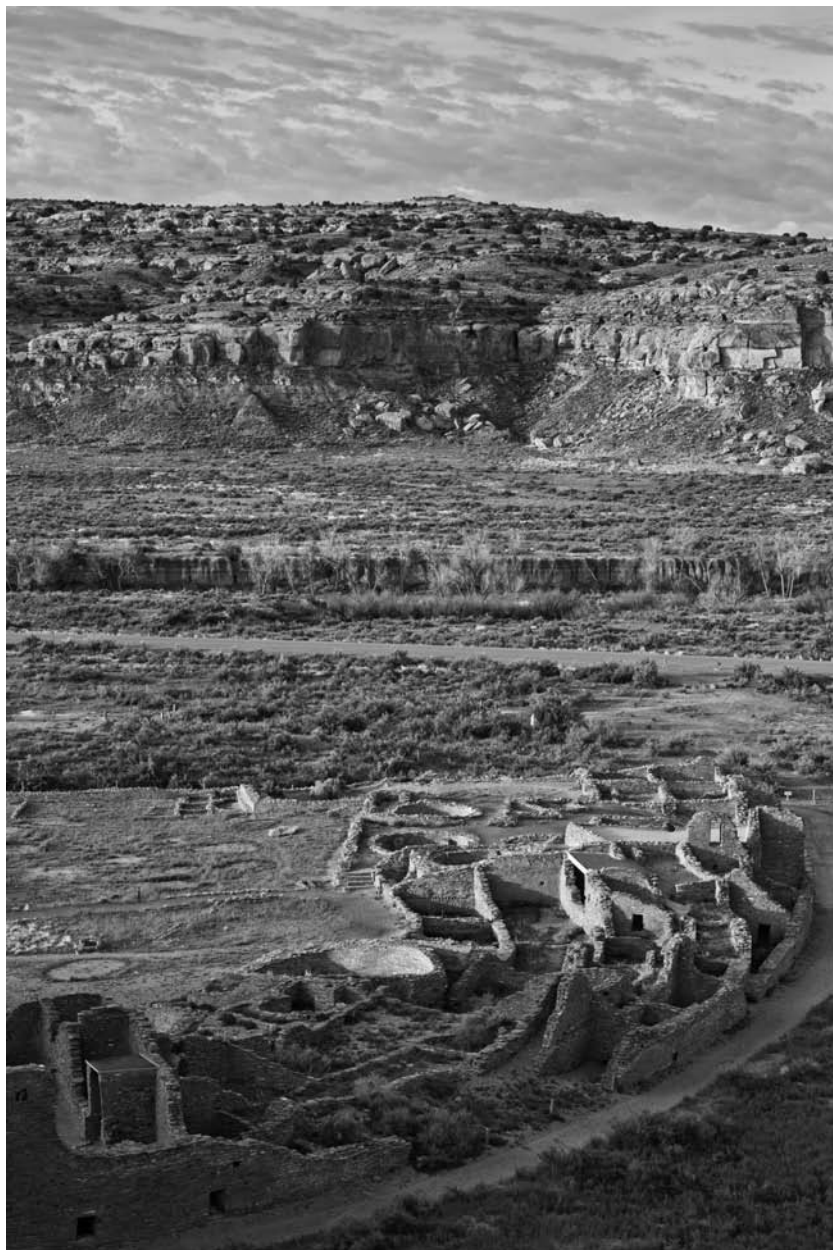


Figure 21.1 Pueblo Bonito and sandstone bluffs, Chaco Culture National Historical Park, New Mexico, USA (Efrain Padro / Alamy)



Figure 21.2 Aerial view of the ruins of Pueblo Bonito, Chaco Culture National Historical Park, New Mexico, USA (Manfred Gottschalk / Alamy)

Shortly after 1000 CE, Great Houses took a canonical turn in form and function: they became monuments, in addition to elite residences. The organic, curved plans of earlier Great Houses were replaced by precise, formal geometries. Great House plans are typically described by letters: “D”-shaped, “E”-shaped, and so forth. Vast blocks of storage rooms, disproportionate storage to the relatively small numbers of residents, were added; as were monumental public and official spaces. Most of Chaco’s Great Houses were built along the north side of the canyon in little over a century, from 1020 to about 1125 CE; but each Great House has a unique construction history and several started much earlier. Pueblo Bonito was one of the earliest Great Houses and is typical – perhaps archetypical – of Chaco Canyon Great Houses (see Fig. 21.2).

Pueblo Bonito took almost three centuries (850 to 1125) to build. At every stage of construction, it was a monumental sight. The “roads” of ancient Chaco (described below) led visitors to the edge of Chaco’s sheer sandstone cliffs, overlooking Bonito’s huge D-shaped ground plan. The building began as a “scaled-up” version of unit pueblos, built three stories tall (normal unit

pueblos were a single, short story). Anasazi masonry of 850 CE was inadequate for multiple stories, so, when the rear wall of Pueblo Bonito began to fail in the early eleventh century, Chaco architects buttressed the old building by enveloping it in an exterior curtain wall of superior stonework – some of the earliest fine masonry for which Chaco is famous. In other cases, Chaco builders razed and replaced existing sections of Great Houses (including parts of Pueblo Bonito), but the original core of Pueblo Bonito remained at the heart of the structure throughout its long history.

Beginning about 1020 CE, the architects of Pueblo Bonito started a series of six major additions, each of which was enormously larger than anything previously built in the Pueblo world. At the culmination, about 1125 CE, almost 700 hundred rooms, massed up to four and perhaps five stories tall, covered an area of about 0.8 hectares (2 acres). Only the outermost shell of Pueblo Bonito's rooms had direct sunlight; most interior rooms were dark and had limited access, suited (presumably) for storage. Only a score of families lived in this huge building.⁸ They were important families who controlled, or at least had access to, vast blocks of storage and non-domestic rooms.

Like other Great Houses, Pueblo Bonito was expensive and laborious to build. That is, the labor-per-unit measure of floor area or roofed volume far exceeded that for unit pueblos – built and maintained by their resident families. Labor on monumental scales was organized and coordinated for site preparation (leveling and terracing); extensive foundations; massive, artfully coursed masonry walls; over-timbered roofs and ceilings (hundreds of thousands of large pine beams brought from distant forests); skillful carpentry, which can only be appreciated today from masonry remnants of elaborate wooden stairways, balconies, and porticos; and other monumental features and furniture unique to these remarkable buildings. Among these were colonnades (a Mesoamerican form, found only at Chetro Ketl); unique raised shelf-platforms (for storage or sleeping) within rooms at most Great Houses; and large sandstone disks (approximately 1 m diameter and 30 cm thick) stacked like pancakes as foundations or dedicatory monuments beneath major roof-support posts of Great Kivas (described below).

Great Houses served the dead as well as the living. The earliest part of Pueblo Bonito, the cluster of earliest rooms at the center of the building,

8 Wesley Bernardini, "Reassessing the Scale of Social Action at Pueblo Bonito, Chaco Canyon, New Mexico," *Kiva* 64 (1999): 447–70, and Thomas C. Windes (ed.), *Investigations at the Pueblo Alto Complex, Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, 1975–79* (Santa Fe, NM: National Park Service, 1987), pp. 383–92.

became a mausoleum for elite burials. Two high-status middle-aged men – perhaps the building’s founders – were buried 850 CE with great wealth in wooden crypts beneath the building’s floor.⁹ These honored dead defined one aspect of the Great House’s monumentality. Later construction preserved the early core with its burials, enveloping the older masonry in better and better-built blocks of rooms. Many more elite deceased were later richly interred in the oldest parts of the building.

In contrast, burials at unit pueblos were typically in middens fronting the homestead, accompanied by a pot or two. Scores of unit pueblos and aggregates of such units – commoner homes – lined the south side of the canyon. These homes were identical to farmsteads throughout Chaco’s region and in regions beyond Chaco’s reach: single (extended) family homes, largely self-sufficient, clustered into scattered communities of a few dozen unit pueblos and with a central Great Kiva, with perhaps 60 to 655 total population.¹⁰ That was the social scale of Anasazi settlement, before Chaco.

Life at a Great House differed in almost every way from life at a unit pueblo. Unit pueblos were built and maintained by the family it housed, with some help no doubt from close relatives. (During Chaco’s era, farmsteads increasingly relied on an organized bulk-trade in pottery and foodstuffs.) The few elite families who actually lived in Pueblo Bonito could not, and did not, build it themselves. Impressive amounts of labor were required to build the huge structure, labor recruited from far beyond Chaco Canyon itself. Commoners from Chaco’s unit pueblo may have done much of the domestic work that kept Pueblo Bonito running. At Pueblo Bonito and other Great Houses, rooms lined with batteries of maize-grinding *metates* (milling stones) and huge ovens in plazas suggest that teams prepared meals for larger groups. Feasting, no doubt: by elites and their followers; or in public ceremonies cementing the elite’s position in society.

Chaco’s Great Houses were by far the largest structures of their times in the Southwest, and Pueblo Bonito was the largest Great House. Great Houses were not the largest pueblo-style sites ever built in the Southwest, however; four centuries after Chaco, Rio Grande villages were much larger than Pueblo Bonito alone (which would fit in the present plaza of Taos

9 Stephen Plog and Carrie Heitman, “Hierarchy and Social Inequality in the American Southwest, A.D. 800–1200,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 107 (2010): 19619–26.

10 Nancy M. Mahoney, “Redefining the Scale of Chacoan Communities,” in John Kantner and Nancy M. Mahoney (eds.), *Great House Communities across the Chacoan Landscape* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000), pp. 19–27.

Pueblo). Great Houses were anomalous because they were the first architectural masses of their size, unique in their time; and because they were not single sites: Great Houses at Chaco – huge as they might be – were elements in a much larger site, Chaco Canyon itself. Taos is a town; Chaco Canyon, with its many Great Houses, was a city.

Pueblo Bonito was only one of a half-dozen major Great Houses at Chaco. There were many smaller Great Houses, mostly built on the north side of the canyon. Great Houses were part of a large, complex settlement; in effect, a city (described below). “Downtown” Chaco as a built environment or city-scape encompassed many other elements, such as roads, mounds, Great Kivas, waterworks, and, on the south side of the canyon, hundreds of unit pueblos. Chaco’s constituent elements are briefly described below.

Roads appear much as their name implies: long, straight, wide (typically 9 m) carefully engineered earthen features. Leveled and bermed, they linked sites to other sites and to natural places. Chaco roads were simpler in construction but not unlike the causeways of slightly earlier La Quemada on the northern edge of Mesoamerica proper, and the more distant *sache* of the Maya.¹¹ Chacoan roads were designed for foot traffic – no beasts of burden, no wheeled vehicles – presumably in wider conformations than could be accommodated on the ubiquitous narrow footpaths that crisscrossed the region. Where roads met cliffs, they constructed wide, elaborate ramps, or carved wide stairways with deep treads and tall risers out of the living rock. Where quotidian footpaths met a cliff, staggered lines of chipped hand- and toe-holds sufficed. Roads were meant for masses of people (pilgrimage), or people in regalia, or even perhaps for troops. The symbolic or monumental aspects of roads were as (or more) important than their utilitarian roles: the dense network of roads in downtown Chaco, for example, created redundant, parallel routes clearly unnecessary for efficient pedestrian use. Roads symbolized, monumentally, political and historical connections between places. Those roads meant something beyond simple transportation.

Many roads ran out from Chaco, like spokes on a wheel. Some lead to distant Great Houses; others lead to important natural features. Road systems converged on Chaco Canyon, suggesting a division of Chaco’s hinterlands into “pie-slices” answering to particular Great Houses around “downtown” Chaco. Many of the regional roads were formally constructed

¹¹ Ben A. Nelson, “Complexity, Hierarchy, and Scale: A Controlled Comparison between Chaco Canyon, New Mexico and La Quemada, Zacatecas,” *American Antiquity* 60 (1995): 597–618.

only at their termini, where they approached or entered Great House complexes. At an “outlying” Great House, a road segment pointing back toward Chaco was perhaps all that was necessary: the missing middle parts were simply understood. An elaborate and extensive line-of-sight communication system, with signal fire stations atop high points, paralleled the road system, allowing information to pass from Chaco to the edges of its region, and back again via “repeater” stations, relatively quickly. We know nothing of the relative sophistication of the communication system. Perhaps it was as simple as yes/no, plus/minus, but given the sophistication of later fire signaling systems in North America, it seems likely that messages of some complexity could be transmitted.

Earthen mounds and masonry platforms encompassed a range of solid structures with (presumably) a variety of purposes. Most mounds were oval, sculpted accumulations of earth, trash, and construction debris. A few mounds have very formal geometric shapes. In front of Pueblo Bonito were two large, head-high, rectangular, masonry-walled, platform mounds, each larger than a basketball court. Stairs led up to their heavily plastered surfaces. We do not know what structures, if any, stood on these platforms. Other earthworks include large berms running alongside roads and huge “trash mounds” or middens at some (but, importantly, not all) Great Houses; these, too, were probably more architectural than depositional.

The north side of Chaco Canyon was lined with small-scale waterworks, capturing rare rainfall in bedrock reservoirs atop the cliffs, and then channeling that water to small fields. These systems have been interpreted as subsistence infrastructure but, given the poor agricultural prospects and the clear monumentality of Chaco Canyon, it seems possible that water was an element of landscape or city-scape architecture, with gardens between Great Houses. Consider the impact on a visitor, after traveling 50 km or more over the barren San Juan Basin, of waterworks in Chaco: a statement of power over the elements. What was grown in Chaco’s gardens? We can only speculate. Maize, to be sure, but perhaps of symbolic value, not for eating. And perhaps other non-subsistence plants: reeds, flowers, and other aquatic vegetation.

Great Kivas were large, round, massively roofed subterranean chambers up to 20 m or more in diameter, with an encircling bench presumably to seat audiences for ritual or other performances. The bench would accommodate up to 150 people. Great Kivas had a very long history in Anasazi building, both before and after Chaco, as community centers; but at Chaco Canyon they were built with the same monumental skills and scales of Great Houses.



Figure 21.3 Great Kiva Chetro Ketl, Chaco Culture National Historical Park, New Mexico, USA (Dale O'Dell / Alamy)

Chacoan Great Kivas formed a class apart. It has been suggested that Chaco “captured” the Great Kiva form from its original community functions, appropriating and redefining it as part of the Chacoan polity (see Fig. 21.3).¹²

The artifacts of Bonito phase in Chaco Canyon, with some very notable exceptions, are those of contemporary Anasazi pottery and lithic industries. While the vast majority of Chaco artifacts were not exceptional, their origins were. Many were manufactured in other Anasazi districts; for example, communities up to 50 to 60 km distant made most of the pottery found at Great Houses in Chaco. Within approximately 150 km radius, bulk goods – timbers, pottery, probably maize and meat – moved into (and perhaps back out of) Chaco Canyon.¹³

Great Houses contained many exotic, unusual, or even unique objects. For example, an intriguing class of ceramic vessels was found almost exclusively at Chaco. Two rooms in Pueblo Bonito contained most of about 200 known cylinder vases, resembling Mesoamerican forms. Chaco Canyon,

12 Ruth M. Van Dyke, “Great Kivas in Time, Space and Society,” in Stephen H. Lekson (ed.), *The Architecture of Chaco Canyon, New Mexico* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2007), pp. 93–126.

13 Nancy J. Malville, “Long-Distance Transport of Bulk Goods in the Pre-Hispanic American Southwest,” *Journal of Anthropological Anthropology* 20 (2001): 230–43.

particularly Pueblo Bonito, is notable for very long-distance imports. About thirty-five copper bells and an equal number of scarlet macaws, all presumably from western Mexico, were found at Chaco. Macaws found at Pueblo Bonito might well have provided feathers for regalia found 250 km away – Chaco’s farthest reach – in southeastern Utah. Recently, cacao – a tropical beverage reserved for Mesoamerican elites – has been detected in Bonito’s cylinder vases.¹⁴ Chaco had more “exotica” than any other eleventh-century site and, indeed, more than all other excavated sites of Chaco’s times, combined.

Turquoise, too, is conspicuous at Chaco Canyon and especially at Pueblo Bonito. Some estimates place the number of recovered pieces at more than 100,000, mostly in the form of small disk beads in elite burials. Many small and large sites at Chaco Canyon contained workshops for the manufacture of turquoise beads, but the source of the stone was not local: there were no turquoise sources near Chaco Canyon. The huge Cerrillos turquoise mines, 190 km southeast of Chaco near Santa Fe, New Mexico, are clearly implicated in Chacoan production of turquoise, and the gemstone was acquired from many other mines in the western United States. Southwestern turquoise, almost certainly from Chaco workshops, was a major export to Mesoamerica, shipped as tesserae (small rectangular plaques) which were then used in the creation of mosaic-covered objects.¹⁵

Thus, the Bonito phase extended far beyond the confines of Chaco Canyon: 150 km radius defined Chaco’s inner circle; 250 km its outer reach; and Mesoamerica its distant trading partner. Chaco was the center of a large “regional system,” about 80,000 sq. km (30,000 sq. miles; the size of Ireland), defined by about 150 smaller “outlier” Great Houses, road networks, and line-of-sight signaling systems. The nature of that regional system is a matter of much debate.

Small “outlier” Great Houses used the same techniques and design principles as Chaco Canyon Great Houses, but the outliers were typically about

14 Patricia L. Crown and W. Jeffrey Hurst, “Evidence of Cacao Use in the Prehispanic American Southwest,” *National Academy of Sciences* 106 (2009), 2110–13.

15 John M. D. Pohl, “Chichimecatlalli: Strategies for Cultural and Commercial Exchange between Mexico and the American Southwest, 1100–1521,” in Virginia M. Fields and Victor Zamudio-Taylor (eds.), *The Road to Aztlan* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), pp. 86–101; Phil G. Weigand and Garman Harbottle, “The Role of Turquoises in the Ancient Mesoamerican Trade Structure,” in Jonathon E. Ericson and Timothy G. Baugh (eds.), *The American Southwest and Mesoamerica: Systems of Prehistoric Exchange* (New York: Plenum Press, 1993); and Colin McEwan, Andrew Middleton, Caroline Cartwright, and Rebecca Stacey, *Turquoise Mosaics from Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

one-twentieth the size of Pueblo Bonito or Chetro Ketl – as if a portion of those giant buildings had been cut away and transplanted up to 250 km away. Almost always, the Great House sat amid (and usually, above) a scattered community of a score or more unit pueblos. Outlier Great Houses might represent direct imposition of Chacoan forms and presumably people; or they could represent local copies or emulations of Chacoan styles; in either case, Great House residents were identified or were identifying with Chaco.

Chaco sat at the center of this region. Not the exact geographic center – Chaco was offset to the east – but at the political, economic, and ritual center of a polity which comprised tens of thousands of people. How many people? Extrapolating from demographic data for the northern third and from ranges of “outlier” community sizes (multiplied by 150 such communities), Chaco’s region comprised perhaps 30,000 to 40,000 people; of whom only a few thousand, at most, resided in Great Houses, perhaps about half at the center in Chaco.

Chaco constituted a city: a regional center which performs services for and transforms its region. More than that – Chaco was a capital city, the seat of political power. Chaco was political or ritual theater, meant to awe and impress. Its population of perhaps 2,700 was comparable to many second- and third-tier Mesoamerican capital cities.¹⁶ Chaco had an overall urban design. First noted by John Fritz, the major Great Houses and other elements are sited relative to a master axis, a precise north–south line that I have elsewhere termed the Chaco Meridian.¹⁷ That axis was monumented by key Great Houses atop the cliffs, high above the canyon: Pueblo Alto to the north and Tsin Kletzin to the south. Recent work by two groups has greatly enriched our understanding of Chaco’s urban design: the Chaco Protection Sites group and the Solstice Project.¹⁸ Both research programs have demonstrated celestial geomancies that shaped Chaco, alignments north–south, and alignments to lunar or solstitial points. The whole urban ensemble of

16 Stephen H. Lekson (ed.), *Great Pueblo Architecture of Chaco Canyon, New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), p. 266; Michael E. Smith, “City Size in Late Postclassic Mesoamerica,” *Journal of Urban History* 31 (2005): 403–34; and Michael E. Smith, *Aztec City-State Capitals* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008).

17 John Fritz, “Paleopsychology Today: Ideational Systems and Human Adaptation in Prehistory,” in Charles L. Redman, Mary Jane Berman, Edward V. Curtin, William T. Langhorne, Nina M. Versaggi, and Jeffery C. Wanser (eds.), *Social Archaeology: Beyond Subsistence and Dating* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), pp. 37–59.

18 John Stein, Richard Friedman, Taft Blackhorse, and Richard Loose, “Revisiting Downtown Chaco,” in Lekson (ed.), *Architecture of Chaco Canyon*, and Anna Sofaer, “The Primary Architecture of the Chacoan Culture: A Cosmological Expression,” in Lekson (ed.), *Architecture of Chaco Canyon*, pp. 225–54.

Great House palaces, mounds, roads, waterworks, and commoner houses closely resembled, as we shall see, the design principles of contemporary Mesoamerican capitals translated into Chaco's local architectural idioms.

What was the Bonito phase?

Interpretations of Chaco varied greatly over the past hundred years. Initially, following Morgan's advice, archaeologists simply assumed that their site, their part of Chaco Canyon, was an independent farming village; Pueblo Bonito was one town, Chetro Kelt another. By the middle of the twentieth century, it became clear that Chaco was a bit more complicated, more than the sum of its parts; it was a complex, multiethnic settlement "not in the direct [historical] line of the . . . Pueblo continuum as it was exposed at the beginning of the historic period."¹⁹ That prescient reinterpretation exceeded our expectations for ancient pueblos – a conceptual "Pueblo Space," discussed below – and it gained little traction.

Still, Chaco's Great Houses were anomalous in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, prompting some archaeologists in the 1950s and 1960s to question the Bonito phase's place in the Anasazi sequence. Was the Bonito phase the result of influence from high civilizations of Mexico? Some concluded that the Bonito phase was the result of Mesoamerican influences.²⁰ Opinion was sharply divided, and James Judge would later summarize Chacoan thinking of that time as either "Mexicanist" or "indigenist."²¹

The New Archaeology of the 1970s and early 1980s favored local adaptation over diffusion, migration, and extra-regional influences. In that intellectual atmosphere, researchers rejected Mesoamerican explanations in favor of the evolution of the Bonito phase as a "complex cultural ecosystem."²² New Archaeology (also known as processual archaeology, for its elevation

19 Gordon Vivian and Tom W. Mathews, *Kin Kletso: A Pueblo III Community in Chaco Canyon, New Mexico* (Tucson, AZ: Southwest Parks and Monuments Association, 1965), p. 115.

20 For example, Alden C. Hayes, "A Survey of Chaco Canyon Archaeology," in Alden C. Hayes, David M. Brugge, and W. James Judge (eds.), *Archaeological Surveys of Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, Publications in Archaeology* 18A (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1981).

21 W. James Judge, "Chaco Canyon-San Juan Basin," in Linda S. Cordell and George J. Gumerman (eds.), *Dynamics of Southwest Prehistory* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), p. 233.

22 W. James Judge, "The Development of a Complex Cultural Ecosystem in the Chaco Basin, New Mexico," in R. M. Linn (ed.), *Proceedings of the First Conference on Scientific Research in the National Parks*, National Park Service Transactions and Proceedings Series 5 (Washington, DC: Dept. of the Interior, 1979), vol. 11, pp. 901–906.

of process over history) posited complex political structures, locally developed but still out of place in a gradual culture history from ancient Anasazi to modern Pueblo. Managerial elites, chiefs, and other political structures went far beyond conventional, egalitarian Pueblo models. Opinion was divided, sometimes bitterly. The most heated debates centered on sites in Arizona; Chaco was (generally, but not universally) accepted as a low-level “complex” society, that is, a “chiefdom” in the terms of those times.

Postprocessual approaches of the 1990s and early 2000s – rejecting Southwestern archaeology’s long association with science and “process” – reconfigured Chaco to fit postmodern tastes. Influenced by European revision (and rejection) of Neolithic chiefdoms, interpretations emphasized ceremony at Chaco, favoring rituality over polity or economy. Postprocessual archaeologies re-established history and contingency as equally important as, or more important than, the evolutionary schemes of New Archaeology. Legal requirements for “culture affiliation” (under NAGPRA) reinforced historical interests. The congruence of postprocessual historicity and legally mandated affiliation studies encouraged an archaeology not unlike culture history of the 1940s and 1950s – the path of cultural affiliation leading back from Pueblos to Chaco also leads forward from Chaco to the modern Tribes. Chaco was reaffirmed as profoundly Puebloan, while at the same time grandly anomalous.

The current range of interpretations of Chaco is staggering – and a bit embarrassing. Chaco, we are told by eminent authorities, was a canyon of farming villages, much like modern Pueblos; or a pilgrimage center; or a militaristic regional capital.²³ These interpretations seem quite distinct and archaeology should be able to tell them apart. But we can’t: there is no consensus, no clear agreement that one interpretation is more likely than another. Lack of agreement suggests that archaeology’s toolkit holds no ethnographic, historical, or theoretical parallels for Chaco (even Pueblo ethnography does not quite cover the spread). We are told repeatedly that

23 e.g. John A. Ware, “Chaco Social Organization: A Peripheral View,” in Linda S. Cordell, W. James Judge, and June-el Piper (eds.), *Chaco Society and Polity: Papers from the 1999 Conference* (Albuquerque: New Mexico Archaeological Council, 2001), pp. 79–93; John A. Ware, “Descent Group and Sodality: Alternative Pueblo Social Histories,” in Sarah H. Schlanger (ed.), *Traditions, Transitions, and Technologies: Themes in Southwestern Archaeology* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002), pp. 94–112; J. McKim Malville and Nancy J. Malville, “Pilgrimage and Periodic Festivals as Processes of Social Integration,” *Kiva* 66 (2001): 327–44; and David R. Wilcox, “The Evolution of the Chacoan Polity,” in J. McKim Malville and Gary Matlock (eds.), *The Chimney Rock Archaeological Symposium: October 20–21, 1990: Durango, Colorado* (Fort Collins, CO: Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, US Dept. of Agriculture, 1993).

no ethnographic or historic model can be found to fit Chaco. Therefore we invent things, uniquenesses that paper over Chaco's anomalies: "*communitas*, or antistructure"; "rituality"; "locus of high devotional expression"; "a corporate faceless chiefdom"; dual priestly leadership whose "authority was derived from control over ritual and esoteric information"; or the leaderless creation of "many thousands of acts of individual decision making to allocate time and energy."²⁴ These are new things under the sun. But, whichever uniqueness we choose, most keep Chaco well below the bar for states, which we cannot pretend ever happened in North America.

Chaco, in the end, is declared deeply mysterious – the "mystery of Chaco" suits the manufactured Southwest of Santa Fe and appeals to the post-millennial spiritualities of many tourists. An unsatisfactory state of affairs: if after a century of disproportionate expenditure of resources at Chaco we must settle for mystery, there seems scant hope for Southwestern archaeology.

Perhaps there's a middle ground? Unlike the stark dichotomy of Mexicanists and indigenists in the 1970s, both ritual and political are important for understanding the Bonito phase. Few researchers would claim one to the exclusion of the other; it is a matter, rather, of degree. To view Chaco data with both ritual and political emphases is legitimate and appropriate, for the data sustain both interests. But, at Chaco, ritual consistently trumps politics. The bias toward ritual is attributable to "the dead hand of ethnography," the still-strong influence of anthropological accounts of Pueblos (Lewis Henry Morgan's directive), reinforced by current heritage concerns of those same Pueblos. Pueblos run on ritual; thus Chaco, too, must have been fundamentally ritual in its structure and operation.

Pueblos are powerful attractors. Even in the heady, sciency, ahistorical days of New Archaeology, archaeology was still anthropology, or it was nothing. And anthropological New Archaeology projected modern (i.e. ethnographic) Pueblo kinship systems back to fourteenth-century Mogollon

24 Norman Yoffee, "The Chaco 'Rituality' Revisited," in Cordell et al. (eds.), *Chaco Society and Polity*; W. H. Wills, "Political Leadership and the Construction of Chaco Great Houses," in Barbara J. Mills (ed.), *Alternative Leadership Strategies in the Prehispanic Southwest* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000), pp. 19–44; W. H. Wills, "Ritual and Mound Formation during the Bonito Phase in Chaco Canyon," *American Antiquity* 66 (2001): 433–35; Timothy K. Earle, "Economic Support of Chaco Canyon Society," *American Antiquity* 66 (2001): 26–35; Colin Renfrew, "Production and Consumption in a Sacred Economy: The Material Correlates of High Devotional Expression at Chaco Canyon," *American Antiquity* 66 (2001): 14–25; Linda S. Cordell and W. James Judge, "Society and Polity," in Lekson (ed.), *Archaeology of Chaco Canyon*; and Michael E. Smith, "What It Takes to Get Complex," in Michael E. Smith (ed.), *The Comparative Archaeology of Complex Societies* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 55.

sites (Broken K and Carter Ranch). Ever since Morgan (and before and after that scientific detour), Pueblos have been the principal frame of reference for thinking about the ancient Southwest, at least the north half. Even for Chaco – with its palaces and urbanism – we favor normalizing or minimizing interpretations congruent with (our view) the institutions of modern Pueblos, the intellectual “Pueblo Space.” Pilgrimage center or rituality or locus of high devotional expression or faceless chiefdoms seem appropriate for ancient Chaco, even though modern Pueblos are not and have none of those things.

Chaco need not have conformed to the Pueblo Space. The obvious pitfall is prochronism: projecting the ethnographic present back into the back. That won’t do: the past was different. Dramatic changes in material culture and social institutions before and after 1300 CE – a watershed – demonstrate that difference. Those differences were profound. For the ancient past, Pueblo ethnography is not sufficient and indeed may not even be necessary – for some questions, ethnography does more harm than good. It provides the wrong frame of reference.

As noted above, Pueblo societies developed in reaction to and rejection of Chaco, after 1300 CE. In some ways, modern Pueblos are perhaps the last place to look for Chacoan insights. We need other, independent, non-Puebloan “triangulation points” to define, delimit, and understand Chaco’s past. Instead of a Puebloan intellectual space defined from nineteenth-century ethnologies and twentieth-century myths, I suggest that we look at what was happening elsewhere in eleventh-century North America – the ancient Southwest’s actual context. Chaco should be contextualized by its contemporaries, specifically Mesoamerica in the ninth through thirteenth centuries (Early and Middle Postclassic periods).²⁵

There may be no useful ethnographic or historic models for Chaco in “Pueblo Space” – ethnographic, geographic, or conceptual. By casting our interpretive nets beyond Pueblo Space into Mesoamerica, we find models that fit Chaco almost perfectly, and effectively “solve” the mystery of Chaco. Mesoamerican models more accurately and effectively represent ancient Chaco than any current, competing model. Specifically, Chaco was an *altepetl*.

In brief: the ubiquitous local polity in Postclassic Mesoamerica was a small unit termed, in Nahuatl, *altepetl* (plural *altepeme*; and hereafter not italicized), a

25 Michael E. Smith and Francis F. Berdan (eds.), *The Postclassic Mesoamerican World* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003).

small city-state. That political formation was also common among many non-Nahua groups. The altepetl form probably began in the Classic period, and perhaps even earlier. Thus, the altepetl political form was widespread across Mesoamerica, and it was antecedent and contemporary with Chaco. It surely would have been known to Chaco and other societies in the Southwest.

The altepetl was NOT a great empire like those of the Aztecs and Tarascans. Those empires encompassed hundreds of altepeme.²⁶ Most altepeme were rather small. Population averaged about 12,000 people, and ranged from as few as 2,000 to as many as 40,000 people – comparable to the population of Chaco's region. Altepetl territory was also small; typically about 75 sq. km; Chaco was a thousand times larger. (We will return to the matter of size.)

An altepetl consisted of a multiple (for example, eight) related noble families, each with their associated commoners, within a defined agricultural territory. It was a tributary system, in which commoners owed goods or labor to their noble families, and minor nobles to major nobles, and so forth. But tribute was not oppressive: a few bushels of maize, a few weeks' labor, occasional military service, and so forth. Nobles ruled their own commoners, who might (or might not) be localized within a spatial segment of the altepetl. Rulership of the altepetl itself revolved around the leading noble families. There was a king, a first-among-equals elected from the several

26 My principal references are María Elena Bernal García, and Angel Julián García Zambrano, "El Altepetl Colonial y sus Antecedentes Prehispanicos: Contexto Teórico-Historiográfico," in Fernández Christlieb Federico and Angel Julián García Zambrano (eds.), *Territorialidad y Paisaje en el Atlepetl del Siglo XVI* (México D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica and Instituto de Geografía de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006), pp. 31–133; Gerardo Gutiérrez, "Territorial Structure and Urbanism in Mesoamérica: The Huastec and Mixtec-Tlpanec-Nahua Cases," in William T. Sanders, Alba Guadalupe Mastache, and Robert H. Cobean (eds.), *Urbanism in Mesoamerica* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University 2003), vol. 1, pp. 85–115; Kenneth G. Hirth, "The Altepetl and Urban Structure in Prehispanic Mesoamerica," in Sanders et al. (eds.), *Urbanism in Mesoamerica*, pp. 57–84; Kenneth G. Hirth, "Incidental Urbanism: The Structure of the Prehispanic City in Central Mexico," in Joyce Marcus and Jeremy A. Sabloff (eds.), *The Ancient City* (Santa Fe, NM: School of Advanced Research Press, 2008), pp. 273–97; Mary G. Hodge, "When Is a City-State? Archaeological Measure of Aztec City-States and Aztec City-State Systems," in Deborah L. Nichols and Thomas H. Charlton (eds.), *The Archaeology of City-States: Cross Cultural Approaches* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), pp. 209–27; James Lockhart, *The Nahuas after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992); Michael E. Smith, "Aztec City States," in Mogens Herman Hansen (ed.), *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures* (Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 2000), pp. 581–95; and Smith, *Aztec City-State Capitals*.

noble families, but the office was not strong, nor did it descend in a kingly line. By the time of the codices, numerological and cosmological rules defined the ideal altepetl form. Theoretically, an ideal altepetl would have eight major noble families, but of course this varied in practice. If the numerological rules codified an older, existing reality, eight could be considered a reasonable “median” (if ideal) number of major noble families. At the height of the Bonito phase about 1075 CE, Chaco had seven major Great Houses, as well as many smaller Great Houses.

Noble families were distinguished (in life and in archaeology) by their palaces: noble houses, elite residences. Great Houses were palaces.²⁷ Noble houses (palaces) could be located in the countryside among commoner farmsteads, but palaces of the major noble families clustered within a tight central zone, often at a place notable in the altepetl’s history. (Noble families might also have other palaces in the countryside.) This “central cluster” might be considered urban. Some archaeologists call them city-states; others deny that the central cluster was fully urban. The central cluster – most notably boasting multiple noble houses or palaces – certainly had urban aspects, but typically it was rather small: median population was about 4,750 people (with a range of 600 to 23,000 people). One third of Aztec altepeme central clusters, for example, had fewer than 3,000 people – about Chaco’s size. Minor nobility and officials resided in smaller palaces in the central cluster and scattered throughout the altepetl.

The cluster of major Great Houses – elite houses or nobles’ palaces – in Chaco Canyon is remarkably similar to the central cluster of altepeme. The seven major Great Houses at Chaco, in this model, represent the altepetl’s seven or eight major noble families and their palaces. Other buildings represent cadet branches, minor nobility, priesthoods, and so forth, much like the minor Great Houses at Chaco. Even the ambiguities and arguments about Chaco’s urban status mirror similar debates about Aztec central clusters.

As in altepeme, the central cluster/city may have been located at Chaco because Chaco Canyon itself was historically important. Centuries before the first Great House, Chaco Canyon had seen truly remarkable developments in Basketmaker III – recalling foundation myths of altepetl central clusters, built at significant places.

27 Stephen H. Lekson, “Lords of the Great House: Pueblo Bonito as a Palace,” in Jessica Joyce Christie and Patricia Joan Sarro (eds.), *Palaces and Power in the Americas, from Peru to the Northwest Coast* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), pp. 99–114.

The radial divisions of Chaco's region, marked by roads radiating out to scores of small, "outlier" Great Houses, parallels the (idealized) radial subdivisions of the altepetl, with each noble family controlling commoners in its piece of the pie. As with the altepetl, commoner residences were built within the central cluster and (of course) throughout the region. Secondary "outlier" Great Houses took care of business in the countryside. And like the altepetl, there is no useful separation of center and countryside: Chaco was not self-sufficient and relied on the region; conversely, the region focused on the center at Chaco Canyon. For both Chaco and altepetl, the ensemble constitutes the polity.

There were, of course, differences: Chaco translated Mesoamerican forms into local idioms of architecture, ideology, and cosmology. Most altepetl central clusters had a pyramid and temple. Platforms in front of Pueblo Bonito might represent Chaco's approximation of "pyramids." John Stein and his colleagues argue for actual pyramids at Chaco, but the jury is out.²⁸ Many altepeme (but not all) had markets. Chaco may have had markets; certainly, the Chaco region saw extensive long-distance movement of bulk goods: beams, pottery, and quite possibly maize. It is worth noting that half of the Aztec altepeme central clusters also lacked markets. Markets, it seems, were not essential.

Chaco, of course, had features and building types not seen in altepeme. Chaco palaces did not look like Mesoamerican palaces – Chaco palaces were bigger! Great Kivas were uniquely Southwestern – although Great Kivas may represent, at least in part, "schools" sometimes found in altepetl central clusters. As noted above, domestic architecture differed enormously: north and west Mesoamerican houses generally comprised three or four freestanding small buildings centered tightly around a patio; Chaco people lived in nicely built pithouses (often called kivas – a mis-attribution of the term for a modern Pueblo ceremonial room) with a suite of above-ground rooms to the rear.

Material culture, social systems, and (presumably) ideologies of Chaco and Mesoamerican societies – "institutions, usages, and mode of life" – were unquestionably different. However, the political structures of altepetl and Chaco were markedly similar. Institutions, usages, and mode of life came with the territory: local customs and local traditions. Political structures,

²⁸ John Stein, Richard Friedman, Taft Blackhorse, and Richard Loose, "Revisiting Downtown Chaco," in Stephen H. Lekson (ed.), *The Architecture of Chaco Canyon* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2007), pp. 199–223.

however, could be imposed top-down by Chaco elites. Alternatively – to make things more palatable – Chacoan political structures might have co-evolved with the altepetl tradition. Indeed, that basic political structure might have been earlier in the north and northern Mesoamerica than in the south, as were colonnades, the bow and arrow, and other important cultural elements.

The biggest difference between the Chaco polity and the altepetl structure is scale and size. While the total population of Chaco's region fell well within altepetl ranges, Chaco's region (80,000 sq. km) was a thousand times larger than the altepetl average, 75 sq. km. The alarming difference in spatial scale may reflect fundamental differences in productivity between Chaco and Mesoamerica. Mesoamerican altepeme enjoyed happy environments for maize; high productivity supported dense populations in relatively small areas. Chaco's region, in contrast, was bleak. Arable lands were scarce, minimally productive, scattered far and wide. Overall population density was consequently quite low – pockets of settlement ("communities") separated by large stretches of desert. Chaco, perhaps, represents the altepetl political form stretched to its elastic limits, over very difficult terrain. Chaco solved its scalar problems with technology and ideology: roads and line-of-sight signaling systems held its over-large domain together . . . for a century or two.

In the end, Chaco failed. Construction at Chaco ceased around 1125; and four decades before that, a new capital began to rise 60 km to the north at Aztec – unsuccessfully: short-lived Aztec Ruins was crippled by a severe drought 1130–1180 CE and collapsed amid war, famine, and massive out-migration by 1275/1300 CE.²⁹ Perhaps the altepetl political form was ill-suited for Chaco's difficult environment and inflated spatial scale. Or perhaps Chaco's altepetl failed because it stood alone. Mesoamerican altepeme were peer-polities, city-states crowded into central Mesoamerica. Altepeme thrived, it seems, on competition. That was the altepetl's proper context, the social and political environment in which it evolved or crystallized. While the political form might have been copied, transplanted, or co-evolved in the Southwest, the altepetl's larger context – highly productive agricultural lands and scores of peer-polities – could not.

29 Stephen H. Lekson, *The Chaco Meridian* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1999); Gary M. Brown, Thomas C. Windes, and Peter J. McKenna, "Animas Anamnesis: Aztec Ruins or Anasazi Capital?" in Paul F. Reed (ed.), *Chaco's Northern Prodigies: Salmon, Aztec, and the Ascendancy of the Middle San Juan Region after A.D. 1100* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2008), pp. 231–50.

Chaco was an *altepetl* – or *altepetl*-like. Is that an outrageous interpretation? Only in an autochthonous Southwest, removed from its larger world. But if we move beyond “Pueblo Space,” Chaco as *altepetl* should not alarm us. Indeed, the *altepetl* has much to recommend it, far beyond competing interpretations of Chaco. The *altepetl* is not a sodality or curing society or *kachina* cult, plucked from ethnographic Pueblos and pasted on the distant past. Nor is it a novel construct, something we invent – ritualities, pilgrimage centers, etc – papering over an ancient polity which was clearly non- or un-Puebloan. Nor is it an anthropological theory (like chiefdoms or corporate hierarchies), or an anthropological case study abstracted from societies distant in time and space (like sub-Saharan chiefdoms without chiefs). The *altepetl* was a real, ubiquitous Native form, of Chaco’s time and place (i.e. North America). There are demonstrable, direct historical connections between Chaco and *altepetl* societies, attested by myriad artifacts and objects moving both ways. The *altepetl* form surely was known in the northern Southwest. Presumably it was well known indeed by Southwestern elites, whose job it was to know. If Chaco wanted to create or evolve into a (secondary) state, the *altepetl* would be the obvious way to go: not too big, not too small, just right. *Altepetl* fits Chaco like a glove.

The US Southwest and Mexico, revisited

Chaco can only be understood in the context of its world history: a frontier society on the edge of, but significantly connected to, Mesoamerica, reflecting the history of Mesoamerica’s civilizations. Indeed, for Chaco, it is probably not useful to consider a separate Mesoamerica and a separate Southwest: Chaco’s nobles probably considered themselves Mesoamerican, indeed as Mesoamerican nobility.

Even more so the rulers of Paquimé, the Southwest’s last great city, built in the fourteenth century in northernmost Chihuahua Mexico.³⁰ Paquimé produced truly astonishing quantities of Mesoamerican objects and animals: 650 fine copper artifacts of superlative craftsmanship, 300 scarlet macaws (many raised on site), 1.5 tons of shell from as far away as the Bay of Banderas. At least three “I”-shaped ball courts and several small “pyramids,” or platforms, surrounded the colonnaded central blocks of the city – blocks built

30 Charles C. Di Peso, *Casas Grandes: A Fallen Trading Center of the Gran Chichimeca* (Dragoon, AZ: Amerind Foundation, 1974), vols. I–III; contra Michael E. Whalen and Paul E. Minnis, “The Local and the Distant in the Origin of Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, Mexico,” *American Antiquity* 68 (2003): 314–32.

in Southwestern, not Mesoamerican, formal traditions. Paquimé was the capital of a region comparable to Chaco's; I have argued elsewhere that its noble families may well have descended from Chaco's.³¹ The city itself dates from 1300 to about 1450 CE (its society jelled earlier, perhaps 1250 CE). Far to the north, nearly modern Pueblos were inventing new ways of holding farming villages together, communally and ritually, eventually developing the unique arrangements of modern Pueblos. Paquimé, however, continued older political structures, derived from or co-evolved with Mesoamerica.

Ben Nelson offered a convincing model of noble families fleeing the fall of Teotihuacan about 550 CE, rippling out to form waves of new polities – nobles whose job it was to lead, finding commoners to be led.³² Those ideas of political organization spread in all directions, including north, and ultimately appeared in the Southwest, first at Chaco (and Aztec Ruins), then at Paquimé. Chaco and Paquimé were capitals of secondary states, political organizations developed locally but inspired by older civilizations to the south. Native North America was never simple.

The traffic went both ways. After 1300 CE, ancient Southwesterners “voted with their feet.” Noble families moved south, towards Mesoamerica. Commoners chose not to move and instead remained behind to become the modern Pueblos. Southwestern political power shifted south, perhaps contributing to the vast, intertwined Chichimec migrations from north to south that sparked the Post-Classic and underwrote the rise of the Aztec empire.

Constant communication linked the histories of the Southwest to those of central and western Mesoamerica, along a range of formal routes. On the east, the old road later renamed El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro linked Mexico City and northern New Mexico. On the west, a well-traveled Native route along the Pacific coastal plains began in the Aztatlan cities of Sinaloa and ended at the Pueblos.³³ Over the rugged Sierra Madres, the Chaco

31 Lekson, *Chaco Meridian*.

32 Ben A. Nelson, “Aggregation, Warfare, and the Spread of the Mesoamerican Tradition,” in Michelle Hegmon (ed.), *The Archaeology of Regional Interaction: Religion, Warfare, and Exchange across the American Southwest and Beyond* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000), pp. 317–37.

33 J. Charles Kelley, “The Aztatlan Mercantile System: Mobile Traders and the Northwestward Expansion of Mesoamerican Civilization,” in Michael S. Foster and Shirley Gorenstein (eds.), *Greater Mesoamerica: The Archaeology of West and Northwest Mexico* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000), pp. 137–54; Carl Sauer and Donald Brand, *Aztatlán: Prehistoric Mexican Frontier on the Pacific Coast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1932); and Carl Sauer, *Road to Cibola* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1932).

Meridian followed a north–south path and, perhaps, influenced the success of sequential capitals on that route: eleventh- to twelfth-century Chaco, the intermediate capital at thirteenth-century Aztec Ruins, fourteenth-century Paquimé, and sixteenth- to seventeenth-century Culiacan, the greatest and northernmost of the Aztatlan cities. And, too, by sea: turquoise, the Southwest’s most important export, was carried coastwise by boat and off-loaded at the great Postclassic city of Tututepec in Oaxaca. Colonial explorers, after the collapse and conquest of Postclassic North America, found these routes perilous adventures; in Chaco’s time, they were arteries of commerce, culture, and history – history played out on continental scales. Carl Sauer made the point well, forty-five years ago:

The exploration of the Americas by Europeans was carried out everywhere by native information and guidance . . . The routes of discovery were Indian routes of communication. I may give an example that determined the major direction of Spanish entry into the American Southwest. When Nuño de Guzmán landed at Pánuco on the Gulf of Mexico in 1525, he met an Indian merchant who had been engaged in trade with Pueblo Indians of the Southwest, a thousand miles distant. Nuño thus was told of another country that was like Mexico, meaning the valley of Mexico. This was the origin of the name New Mexico, supposedly a land of cities and wealth. Nuño did not follow up this information at the time, but when later he went five hundred miles west to the Pacific Coast of Sinaloa, he started from there in search of that northern land, which was quite as far away and on an entirely different route. He set out on the most direct course with Indian guides. His failure to reach New Mexico had nothing to do with uncertainty of direction, which was as well known to natives of the West as it was on the eastern coast. Indian trade, to an extent that has been little considered, gave wider geographical horizons, not only in the higher cultures.³⁴

Not only “higher cultures” – all of North America! Mesoamerican and continental inspirations in the Southwest long predated Chaco. The Southwest’s first monumental constructions – massively terraced hillsides such as Cerro Juanqueña – date approximately to the Olmec era in Mesoamerica, and Poverty Point’s precocious monumentality in the Mississippi Valley.³⁵ Hohokam’s rise correlates well with Teotihuacan’s fall,

34 Carl Sauer, “On the Background of Geography in the United States,” originally in, “Festschrift für Gottfried Pfeifer,” *Heidelberger Geog. Arbeiten* 15 (1967): 59–71, repr. in Bob Callahan (ed.), *Selected Essays 1963–1975* (Berkeley, CA: Netzahualcoyotl Historical Society, Turtle Island Press, 1988), p. 243.

35 Robert J. Hard and John R. Roney, “Late Archaic Period Hilltop Settlements in Northwestern Chihuahua, Mexico,” in Barbara J. Mills (ed.), *Identity, Feasting, and the Archaeology of the Greater Southwest* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado 2004), pp. 276–94.

and the extraordinary florescence of Hopewell in the upper reaches of the Mississippi drainage. Chaco was contemporary with two great cities: Tula in central Mexico and Cahokia in the Middle Mississippi. These correspondences could be dismissed as coincidences, but the continental scales of Chaco and Paquimé suggest that North American prehistory must be framed on such scales: a New World history.

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Australasia and the Pacific

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There is a point on Google Earth where you can rotate the image of the globe so that all you see is the vastness of the Pacific Ocean and the continental landmasses of Australasia (Australia and New Guinea). Taking in 190 million km² and more than a third of the globe, the world of Oceania, embracing Australasia and the Pacific, has a diverse human history spanning at least 50,000 years and including the speakers of nearly 1,300 historically known languages. This history is one of extremes, with small groups of modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) migrating out of South-East Asia and voyaging across the seas to the Ice Age mega-island of Sahul (Australia and New Guinea) by 50,000 years ago. This migration left behind a history that began 1–2 million years ago and involved three species of human: *Homo erectus*, *Homo floresiensis* (the ‘hobbit’) and modern humans. For nearly all of this time, the vast expanse of Remote Oceania – extending for 12,600 kilometres east–west between Palau and Rapa Nui (Easter Island) and for 8,100 kilometres north–south between Hawaii and New Zealand – was empty of people. It is not until 3,500 years ago that pioneering seafarers began venturing eastwards from the islands of northeastern New Guinea and across other Melanesian islands of Near Oceania and eventually into Remote Oceania (taking in the islands of southern and eastern Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia). Polynesian seafarers finally reached New Zealand (Aotearoa) in the south 700 years ago. Here in the Southern Ocean the ancestors of the Maori, in perhaps the final great act of human global colonisation, landed a mere 1,400 kilometres from Tasmania where Ice Age colonists settled 40,000 years earlier. The abysses of time separating the colonisation histories of South-East Asia, Australasia and the Pacific are reflected in the diverse array of societies that moved into and emerged in

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each of these immense geographic and cultural domains. These societies developed different forms of organisational structures ranging from the largely achieved leadership of hunter-gatherer Aboriginal Australia and 'Big Man' societies of agricultural New Guinea through to the hereditary chiefdoms of agricultural Polynesia.¹ Yet despite the vast distances separating these communities, the past 3,000 years is a history of connections between groups located hundreds and in some cases thousands of kilometres apart. Such connections represent key themes in the social and political histories of these regions, with complex alliance and ceremonial exchange systems expressing myriad intergroup cultural dynamics, adaptive strategies and the entrepreneurial desires of peoples to mutually construct their social worlds through inter-community networks.

Charting the expanse of Oceanic history is a daunting task given what we know and do not know. This chapter embraces the challenge of presenting a summary history of Oceania, focusing on chronological changes in social interactions and social formations over the past 3,000 years using selected case studies to illustrate the flavour of Australasian and Pacific island societies. I have divided this history into Australia, Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia while being acutely aware that such divisions are colonial constructs that have in many respects outlived their classificatory and heuristic usefulness.² A key feature will be a consideration of the blurred and dynamic boundaries and cultural and historical overlaps between divisions, particularly the Melanesia–Polynesia divide. A further limitation of these divisions is that they privilege European scholarly traditions at the expense of Indigenous people's epistemologies and historical constructions of their pasts. For these societies, the symbolic process of recording information and knowledge was not formal writing but elaborate oral histories and complex forms of material culture. Written historical records for Oceania began with the arrival of Europeans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Modern Western historiography, in an attempt to transcend the limitations of its own disciplinary confines, is attempting to write more inclusive histories of Oceanic peoples through collaborative research

1 Douglas L. Oliver, *Oceania: The Native Cultures of Australia and the Pacific Islands* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989), vols. 1 and 11.

2 Nicholas Thomas, 'The Forces of Ethnology: Origins and Significance of the Melanesia/Polynesia Division', *Current Anthropology* 30 (1989): 27–41; John E. Terrell, Kevin M. Kelly and Paul Rainbird, 'Foregone Conclusions? In Search of "Papuan" and "Austronesians"', *Current Anthropology* 42 (2001): 97–124; and Geoff R. Clark (ed.), 'Dumont d'Urville's Divisions of Oceania: Fundamental Precincts or Arbitrary Constructs?', *Journal of Pacific History* 38 (2003): 197–215.

which allows nuanced and culturally informed readings of ancient material culture using archaeological techniques enhanced by oral histories and recent ethnographies.³ This approach is slowly shining a light on the previously hidden histories of Oceania and placing these within the broader narratives of humanity's shared and connected pasts.

Australia

At the time of sustained British colonial invasion in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Australia was home to upwards of 1 million Aboriginal people divided into at least 250 languages and hundreds of 'tribal' groupings. In addition, the mainlands of Australia and New Guinea were separated by the 150 kilometre-wide Torres Strait, the maritime home of some 3,000–4,000 people divided into at least fifteen island communities and two major language groups. Owing to the complex and dynamic nature of Aboriginal social organisation which operated at a variety of scales, each with its own negotiated territorial boundaries, the term 'tribe' is seen by anthropologists today to be simplistic and of limited descriptive value. While the subsistence regime of Aboriginal peoples has traditionally been characterised as hunting and gathering, it is becoming increasingly clear that most groups also practised degrees of food production, resource intensification and environmental manipulation.⁴ For example, all groups fired the landscape to change vegetation and promote growth of certain plant and animal species. More extreme, the Gunditjmara of south-west Victoria radically manipulated waterways and swamps to enhance growing conditions for eels as a form of aquaculture. Even in the Torres Strait located next to agricultural New Guinea, food production systems on islands ranged from large-scale agricultural mound-and-ditch field systems to subtle enhancement of hunting-and-gathering landscapes through fire. In all cases, groups practised degrees of mobility between strategically spaced and placed settlements across mosaic landscapes to accommodate natural and culturally constructed spatial and seasonal variations in resource availability. Social and political organisation also varied considerably across the continent,

3 Ian Lilley (ed.), *Archaeology of Oceania: Australia and the Pacific Islands* (Carlton, Victoria: Blackwell, 2006); and Ian J. McNiven and Lynette Russell, *Appropriated Pasts: Indigenous Peoples and the Colonial Culture of Archaeology* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005).

4 Lesley Head, Jennifer Atchison and Richard Fullagar, 'Country and Garden: Ethnobotany, Archaeobotany and Aboriginal Landscapes near the Keep River, Northwestern Australia', *Journal of Social Archaeology* 2 (2002): 173–96.

with leadership amongst clan and multi-clan groups ranging from earned through to rare cases of hereditary status. Broadly speaking, governance was not institutionalised. Leadership centred on a group of senior male Elders who had acquired through experience critical social, political and religious (secular and sacred) knowledge. Beyond local clan affairs, governance and leadership also concerned maintaining and controlling complex socio-political and ceremonial relationships and exchange networks with neighbouring groups. An important feature of exchange transactions in Aboriginal societies is that they helped maintain social relationships between peoples and communities. In this sense, chronological and spatial changes in the movement of goods also maps out the changing history of social, political and religious networks and relationships.⁵

Archaeological research reveals that the foundations of Aboriginal societies and cultures were laid down in the deep past during the Pleistocene (Ice Age) between 10,000 and 50,000 years ago. It is generally believed that Australia was colonised by maritime peoples originating in South-East Asia at least 50,000 years ago using watercraft when sea levels were more than 50 metres lower than present and the Australian mainland was joined to Tasmania in the south and New Guinea in the north to form the mega-island continent known as Sahul.⁶ All major environments across Sahul had resident communities by 40,000–45,000 years ago, demonstrating the extraordinary adaptability of these ancient peoples. While population numbers during the Pleistocene were low and many areas were used only marginally compared to the situation recorded historically, long-distance movement of objects reveals large-scale social networks and information flow spanning hundreds of kilometres across the continent. For example, at Lake Mungo in western New South Wales, the nearest known source for red ochre associated with a burial dated to 40,000–45,000 years ago is at least 200 kilometres away. Around 30,000 years ago the presence of marine shells in the lower levels of Riwi rockshelter in northern Western Australia indicates movement of symbolically charged objects over a distance of at least 500 kilometres from their coastal source.⁷ Off the north-east coast of Sahul on New Ireland (Papua New Guinea), obsidian artefacts found in the lower levels of

5 Norman B. Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); and Ian Keen, *Aboriginal Economy & Society: Australia at the Threshold of Colonisation* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2004).

6 Peter Hiscock, *Archaeology of Ancient Australia* (London: Routledge, 2008).

7 Jane Balme and Kate Morse, 'Shell Beads and Social Behaviour in Pleistocene Australia', *Antiquity* 80 (2006): 799–811.

Matenbek rockshelter dated 18,000–20,000 years ago derive from quarries located 350 kilometres distant on New Britain.⁸

Despite ancient foundations, the complex dimensions of social arrangements that characterise ethnographically known Australian Indigenous societies emerged largely within the past 3,000–4,000 years. These dimensions include the development and spread of formalised and distinctive stone-tool types across the continent, regionalisation of rock-art styles, development of large-scale ceremonial gatherings involving hundreds of people, establishment of large-scale prestige object exchange systems and emergence of elaborate ceremonial site complexes. Tula scrapers exemplify the spread of newly developed stone-tool types across much of Australia over the past 4,000 years. They are a special type of scraper made by men retouching a flake such that it has a straight or curved working edge. These were hafted with spinifex grass resin onto wooden handles and even onto the end of spear-throwers. Their robust form makes them well suited to working hard arid-zone woods and highly reliable. As tulas can be repeatedly resharpened by the removal of tiny flakes from the working edge, they are easily maintained, creating a reliable tool with a long use-life. Such tools are a sophisticated adaptation to the highly mobile lifestyles that characterise arid-zone societies. The shared use of tulas across the arid zone would have facilitated social relationships and networks crucial to negotiating resource sharing amongst highly mobile and territorial groups exploiting harsh arid environments. Use of tulas is seen as part of an array of strategic technological and social developments aimed at establishing and maintaining ‘safety nets’ to offset risks associated with environmental uncertainty and resource unpredictability stemming from late Holocene climatic variability, in particular intensification of El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) climatic events.⁹ The uptake of distinctive tool types such as tulas reveals a desire for social

8 Glenn R. Summerhayes, ‘Obsidian Network Patterns in Melanesia: Sources, Characterisation and Distribution’, *Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association* 29 (2009): 110–24.

9 Peter Veth, Peter Hiscock and Alan Williams, ‘Are Tulas and ENSO Linked?’, *Australian Archaeology* 72 (2011): 7–14; Robert Whallon, ‘Social Networks and Information: Non-“Utilitarian” Mobility Among Hunter-Gatherers’, *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 25 (2006): 259–70; Glenn R. Summerhayes, ‘Island Melanesian Pasts: A View from Archaeology’, in Jonathan S. Friedlaender (ed.), *Population Genetics, Linguistics, and Culture History in the Southwest Pacific* (Oxford University Press, 2007); Esa Hertell and Miikka Tallavaara, ‘High Mobility or Gift Exchange: Early Mesolithic Exotic Chipped Lithics in Southern Finland’, in Tuija Rankama (ed.), *Mesolithic Interfaces: Variability in Lithic Technologies in Eastern Fennoscandia* (Helsinki: The Archaeological Society of Finland, 2011); and Peter White, ‘Backed Artefacts: Useful Socially and Operationally’, *Australian Archaeology* 72 (2011): 67–75.

inclusiveness by multiple neighbouring communities through shared possession and use of mutually recognisable items of material culture. The success of Aboriginal desert societies also centred on shared knowledge and gender relations associated with preparation of grass seed bread following laborious preparation of seed flour by women using large sandstone grindstones. Ethnographically, these large grindstones were prized heirlooms obtained originally through long-distance exchange relationships. Most archaeological evidence for grindstone use in the arid zone dates to the past 3,000 years.¹⁰

Paralleling the spread of tools such as tulas across the continent is the development of formalised exchange networks spanning hundreds and even thousands of kilometres.¹¹ The elaboration of exchange networks involving prestige and symbolically charged objects such as marine shells, Kimberley points and ground-edge axes at various times during the past 3,000 years is seen as expressing and maintaining newly developed social relationships and alliances and an intensification of inter-regional group social, political, ceremonial and religious dynamics. The scale of these networks is revealed by the southern movement of baler shell (*Melo* sp.) and pearl shell (*Pinctada* sp.) adornments sourced to the tropical coast of northern Australia across much of the continent over the past 2,000 years.¹² Indeed, such shells were exchanged, traded or moved across the continent from the northern to the southern shores along pathways spanning some 2,000 kilometres. Such is the complexity of exchanges that in the Port Keats region of the Northern Territory, one set of exchange objects formally passed through the hands of 134 individuals over a distance of less than 300 kilometres in 1950.¹³ In many cases, exchange relationships mirrored and celebrated the geographical pathways (songlines) of creator and ancestral beings whose stories were enshrined in Dreaming (cosmological) narratives that imbued landscapes with spiritual essences, power and chains of religious, ceremonial and social connection.¹⁴

10 Bruno David, *Landscapes, Rock-Art and the Dreaming: An Archaeology of Preunderstanding* (London: Leicester University Press, 2002).

11 Oliver, *Oceania*, chapter 12.

12 D. John Mulvaney, "'The Chain of Connection': The Material Evidence", in Nicholas Peterson (ed.), *Tribes and Boundaries in Australia* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1976); Kim Akerman and John Stanton, *Riji and Jakuli: Kimberley Pearl Shell in Aboriginal Australia*, Monograph Series 4 (Darwin: Northern Territory Museum of Arts and Sciences, 1994); and Mike A. Smith and Peter Veth, 'Radiocarbon Dates for Baler Shell in the Great Sandy Desert', *Australian Archaeology* 58 (2004): 37–38.

13 Johannes Falkenberg, *Kin and Totem: Group Relations of Australian Aborigines in the Port Keats District* (Oslo University Press, 1962).

14 Bruce Chatwin, *Songlines* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1987); Debra B. Rose, *The Dingo Makes Us Human* (Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Donald F. Thomson, *Economic*

In the Kimberley region of northern Western Australia, delicately made bifacial points with fine pressure-flaking along the margins to create serrated edges were hafted as spearpoints and butchering knives but also used unhafted as knives in ritual and secular contexts.¹⁵ Kimberley points made for exchange were prestige objects usually manufactured out of high-quality stone (e.g. jasper or agate, and glass after European contact) and made thin and fragile to enhance aesthetic and other symbolic properties. Exchange networks operated regionally across the Kimberley but also extended over 1,000 kilometres south-east into the desert societies of central Australia where the points could be used as ceremonial knives. Pathways of exchange were complex and worked outwards through intricate kinship networks linked to reaffirming social, political, ceremonial and religious practices, obligations, rights and responsibilities.

In eastern Australia, extensive ground-edge stone-axe exchange networks also reveal chains of connection between hundreds of communities across vast regions. Although the world's oldest-known ground-edge stone axes dating to 35,000 years ago have been found in Arnhem Land, elaborate axe trade networks appear to develop mostly within the past 3,000 years.¹⁶ For example, the Lake Moondarra metabasalt axe quarry near Mt Isa in north-west Queensland extends over an area of 2.4 km². It features raw material extraction pits where up to 30 m³ of rock rubble was removed and manufacturing zones with metre-high piles of flaking debris where blocks of stone weighing up to 100 kilograms were broken apart and shaped into axe blanks ready for export.¹⁷ As many as 800,000 partly made axes remain at the quarry site, indicating the scale of production over the past 1,000 years. The local Kalkadoon people took the axes to markets located immediately outside of their territory where exchange took place with their neighbours. From here the axes were traded southwards down western Queensland and

Structure and the Ceremonial Exchange Cycle in Arnhem Land (Melbourne: Macmillan & Co., 1949).

- 15 Kim Akerman, Richard Fullagar and Annelou van Gijn, 'Weapons and Wunan: Production, Function and Exchange of Kimberley Points', *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1 (2002): 13–42; and Rodney Harrison, 'An Artefact of Colonial Desire? Kimberley Points and the Technologies of Enchantment', *Current Anthropology* 47 (2006): 63–88.
- 16 Jean-Michel Geneste, Bruno David, Hugues Plisson, Jean-Jacques Delannoy and Fiona Petchey, 'The Origins of Ground-Edge Axes: New Findings from Nawarla Gabarnmang, Arnhem Land (Australia) and Global Implications for the Evolution of Fully Modern Humans', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 22 (2012): 1–17.
- 17 Peter Hiscock, 'Standardised Axe Manufacture at Mount Isa', in Ingrid Macfarlane, Mary-Jane Mountain, and Robert Paton (eds.), *Many Exchanges: Archaeology, History, Community and the Work of Isabel McBryde* (Canberra: Aboriginal History Inc., 2005).

as far as South Australia over a distance of 1,000 kilometres.¹⁸ In south-east Australia, stone axes manufactured by Kulin peoples for at least the past 1,000 years from greenstone quarried at Mt William, north of Melbourne, were traded up to 600–700 kilometres distant.¹⁹ Significantly, some areas that imported the renowned and prestigious axes also had similar stone outcrops suitable for quarrying and axe manufacture within their own territories, revealing that resource scarcity was not a key driver of axe exchange. That movement of Mt William stone axes was largely an expression of social networks, and maintenance of social relationships is revealed by the absence of axe exchange to the east with Gunai/Kurnai peoples with whom the Kulin had hostile relations.

The intensification of social networks and exchange systems during the past 3,000 years can be seen as a strategic move by community leaders to obviate in part social and political frictions associated with population increase and the concomitant emergence of more social groups.²⁰ Further expressions of these developments were a diversification and regionalisation of rock-art styles, mound-building, elaboration of cemeteries and expansion of inter-regional group gatherings associated with super-abundances of special food resources. Although rock art in Australia extends well back into the Pleistocene, the past 3,000 years saw an efflorescence of stylistic diversity linked to regional developments in corporate group identity and territorial and ceremonial/religious place-marking and place-making strategies to help demarcate social differences and similarities at differing geographical scales.²¹ For example, some of Australia's most distinctive rock-art stylistic provinces, such as the Quinkans of the Laura region of southern Cape York Peninsula, the stencilled art of the central Queensland highlands and the Wandjina art of the Kimberley region, all emerge within the past

18 Isabel McBryde, 'Goods from Another Country: Exchange Networks and the People of the Lake Eyre Basin', in D. John Mulvaney and J. Peter White (eds.), *Australians to 1788* (Broadway, NSW: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, 1987); and Iain Davidson, Nick Cook, Matthew Fischer, Malcolm Ridges, June Ross and Stephen Sutton, 'Archaeology in Another Country: Exchange and Symbols in North-West Central Queensland', in Macfarlane et al. (eds.), *Many Exchanges*.

19 Isabel McBryde, 'Kulin Greenstone Quarries: The Social Contexts of Production and Distribution for the Mt. William Site', *World Archaeology* 16 (1984): 267–85; and Adam Brumm, '"The Falling Sky": Symbolic and Cosmological Associations of the Mt. William Greenstone Axe Quarry, Central Victoria, Australia', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 20 (2010): 179–96.

20 Harry Lourandos, *Continent of Hunter-Gatherers: New Perspectives in Australian Prehistory* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

21 Bruno David and Meredith Wilson (eds.), *Inscribed Landscapes: Marking and Making Place* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002).



Figure 22.1 Shell mound at Imbuorr, Weipa area, dating to the past 3,000 years (Photograph by Michael Morrison)

2,000–3,000 years.²² In some regions, particularly along the Murray River in south-eastern Australia, increasing territoriality was expressed in mortuary practices whereby the dead were placed into formalised cemeteries containing hundreds of ancestors.²³ For other communities, place-marking took the form of monumentalising the landscape in the form of mound creation. The most extreme example of this practice occurred along the west coast of Cape York Peninsula, where shells representing the remains of millions of meals were piled up into huge mounds up to 13 metres in height and 2,700 years in age. In western Victoria, a tradition of earthen mound construction commenced around 2,500 years ago whereby campsite deposits, particularly from earth ovens, were heaped up into 1- to 2-metre-high mounds.²⁴ In some cases the dead were buried within these mounds, and, like formal cemeteries along the Murray River, they expressed and reaffirmed the ongoing complex symbolic link between the ancestors, the living and the land (see Fig. 22.1).

Ethnographic information reveals that many Aboriginal groups participated in large-scale gatherings and feasting involving hundreds of people for

22 Michael J. Morwood, *Visions from the Past: The Archaeology of Australian Aboriginal Art* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002); and David, *Landscapes, Rock-Art and the Dreaming*.

23 Colin Pardoe, 'The Cemetery as Symbol: The Distribution of Prehistoric Aboriginal Burial Grounds in Southeastern Australia', *Archaeology in Oceania* 16 (1988): 173–78; and Harry Allen and Judith Littleton, 'Hunter-Gatherer Burials and the Creation of Persistent Places in Southeastern Australia', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 26 (2007): 283–98.

24 Michael Morrison, 'Old Boundaries and New Horizons: The Weipa Shell Mounds Reconsidered', *Archaeology in Oceania* 38 (2003): 1–8; and Elizabeth Williams, 'Complex Hunter-Gatherers: A View from Australia', *Antiquity* 61 (1987): 310–21.

social, political and religious reasons and the performance of ceremonies associated with initiation, gift exchange, marriage, etc.²⁵ Archaeological evidence for the emergence of these gatherings is little understood and often linked indirectly to what is assumed to be concomitant evidence for increases in population during the past 3,000 years. For example, across many parts of the arid zone at various times of the year, hundreds of people from numerous communities would assemble to perform ceremonies sustained by large accumulations of grass seed bread. On the fertile east coast every three years or so, hundreds of Aboriginal people representing numerous groups from north-east New South Wales and south-east Queensland would converge on the Bunya Mountains and Blackall Range in south Queensland to participate in the Bunya festivals. These gatherings were scheduled to coincide with bumper-crops of Bunya Pine seeds.²⁶ Similarly, during summer months in the south-eastern Australian Alps, after snow had melted and large areas became habitable, hundreds of Aboriginal peoples from groups in far eastern Victoria and south-eastern New South Wales walked hundreds of kilometres to ascend these uplands for gatherings supported by huge congregations of highly nutritious Bogong moths.²⁷ Each summer, millions of these moths migrate over hundreds of kilometres into the Alps to aestivate, which is a type of hibernation to avoid the searing summer heat. These large colonies of up to 17,000 m² rest in cool, dry and dark crevices between granite boulders from October to March each year.

In western Victoria, up to 1,000 people from numerous groups were known to gather near Lake Bolac to take advantage of huge seasonal runs of eels. Early historical records from the 1840s record that Aboriginal men constructed large and elaborate stone-walled traps across waterways to catch eels in long baskets woven by women. These records also reveal that Aboriginal people expanded the habitat of eels by excavating extensive networks of trenches across swampy terrain. One such engineering feature was a channel excavated over a distance of 3 kilometres to allow eels to artificially expand their range into a previously uninhabited lake. In this sense, Aboriginal people attended large-scale social gatherings that were supported

25 Lourandos, *Continent of Hunter-Gatherers*.

26 Michael J. Morwood, 'The Archaeology of Social Complexity in South-East Queensland', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 53 (1987): 337–50.

27 Josephine Flood, *The Moth Hunters: Aboriginal Prehistory of the Australian Alps* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1980); and Josephine Flood, Bruno David, John Magee and Bruce English, 'Birrigai: A Pleistocene Site in the South-Eastern Highlands', *Archaeology in Oceania* 22 (1987): 9–26.



Figure 22.2 Gunditjmara fishtrap at Lake Condah used and modified over the past 6,600 years (Photograph by Ian J. McNiven)

by both natural and artificially constructed super-abundances of eels.²⁸ At Lake Condah, in the same region, palaeoenvironmental evidence suggests that Aboriginal people dammed off the lake's outlet to artificially maintain water levels and eel stocks around 4,600 years ago to help avert the negative impacts of climatic drying. Excavations at a large 350 metre-long stone-walled fishtrap at Lake Condah indicate even earlier hydrological manipulation with initial channel construction around 6,600 years ago with major stone-rubble wall additions during the past 800 years (Fig. 22.2).²⁹ Such large-scale hydrological engineering facilities required new levels of social organisation and

28 Harry Lourandos, 'Change or Stability? Hydraulics, Hunter-Gatherers and Population in Temperate Australia', *World Archaeology* 11 (1980): 245–66.

29 Heather Builth, Peter Kershaw, Chris White, Anna Roach, Lee Hartney, Merna McKenzie, Tara Lewis and Geraldine Jacobsen, 'Environmental and Cultural Change on the Mt Eccles Lava-Flow Landscapes of Southwest Victoria, Australia', *The Holocene* 18 (2008): 413–24; and Ian J. McNiven, Joe Crouch, Thomas Richards, Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Nic Dolby and Geraldine Jacobsen, 'Dating Aboriginal Stone-Walled Fishtraps at Lake Condah, Southeast Australia', *Journal of Archaeological Science* 39 (2012): 268–86.

complexity, and it is significant that western Victoria appears to have had hereditary leaders akin to chiefs.³⁰

The past 1,000 years also witnessed rapid demographic, social, political and ceremonial developments across the islands of Torres Strait in the far north-east corner of modern Australia. Increases in the number and size of midden deposits in villages indicate increases in the number of people permanently occupying islands within the past 800 years. Around 400–500 years ago, a number of these communities began building ritual installations in the form of accumulations of large trumpet-shells and huge piles of dugong bones. Some of the shell arrangements contain over 200 shells, while bone mounds range in size from a couple of cubic metres representing fewer than 100 dugongs to the Dabangai Bone Mound on Mabuyag island which contains up to 42 m³ of bone and the remains of 10,000–11,000 dugongs.³¹ These shell and bone installations were also incorporated variously into ceremonial site complexes (*kod*) and were associated with different totemic clan groups. *Kod* sites were known to host initiation, mortuary and head-hunting ceremonies and turtle and dugong hunting rituals. Archaeological excavation of *kod* sites reveals that these communal ceremonial centres began developing around 400 years ago as a way of both expressing and managing the ethnographically known totemic clan structure of island communities (Fig. 22.3).³²

Melanesia

The Melanesian world extends from the continental island of New Guinea and south and eastwards out into the western Pacific Ocean through the island nation-states of Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji. It includes north-eastern Sahul and Near Oceania and crosses into the central western sections of Remote Oceania. The region is home to diverse cultures and speakers of over 1,000 languages (representing around 20 per cent of the world's languages), of which 900 are found across New Guinea.

30 Heather Built, 'Gunditjmarra Environmental Management: The Development of a Fisher-Gatherer-Hunter Society in Temperate Australia', in Colin Grier, Jangsuk Kim and Junzo Uchiyama (eds.), *Beyond Affluent Foragers* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2006).

31 Ian J. McNiven and Alice Bedingfield, 'Past and Present Marine Mammal Hunting Rates and Abundances: Dugong (*Dugong dugon*) Evidence from Dabangai Bone Mound, Torres Strait', *Journal of Archaeological Science* 35 (2008): 505–15.

32 Ian J. McNiven, Bruno David, Goemulgau Kod and Judith Fitzpatrick, 'The Great *Kod* of Pulu: Mutual Historical Emergence of Ceremonial Sites and Social Groups in Torres Strait, NE Australia', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 19 (2009): 291–317.



Figure 22.3 Two reconstructed views of the ceremonial totemic site (*kod*) with hammerhead shark and crocodile effigies, Iama island, Torres Strait, late nineteenth century. Left: with enclosures. Right: without enclosures. (Drawing by A. C. Haddon, from Hutchinson 1931)

The earliest archaeological evidence for people in Melanesia comes from sites in the Ivane Valley in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea (PNG) located 70 kilometres inland from the modern city of Port Moresby on the south coast. Here radiocarbon dates of up to 49,000 years ago have been obtained on charcoal found associated with a range of stone tools.³³ Remarkably well-preserved yam starch grains and carbonised pandanus nutshells provide rare insights into Ice Age plant food use in this remote montane valley elevated ~2000 metres above sea level. Excavations at Matenkupkum limestone rockshelter on New Ireland indicate that terminal Pleistocene peoples of New Guinea were also exploiting marine resources such as shellfish and fish. The hunting-and-gathering Ice Age societies of New Guinea most likely lived in small clan-based communities who moved seasonally across landscapes and between resource patches which they understood intimately. Little is known of the ceremonial, religious, social and political life of these ancient peoples.

33 Glenn R. Summerhayes, Matthew Leavesley, Andrew Fairbairn, Herman Mandui, Judith Field, Anne Ford and Richard Fullagar, 'Human Adaptation and Plant Use in Highland New Guinea 49,000 to 44,000 Years Ago', *Science* 330 (2010): 78–81.

Around 10,000 years ago, Highland communities of PNG began planting yams, bananas and taro in swidden patches, supplemented by considerable foraging for wild plants and hunting of animals in local forests. By 7,000 years ago, cultivation intensified, evidenced by the construction of elaborate artificially constructed mounds and drainage channels and related environmental evidence for major forest clearance and burning associated with swidden cultivation and consequent development of grasslands.³⁴ It is likely that such large-scale water management systems were accompanied by changes in social organisation whereby new hierarchies of leadership developed to accommodate the demands of agricultural production and long-term commitments and investments in tending to crops and maintaining channels. Key agricultural crops recorded ethnographically are taro, bananas, yams, sugar cane and sweet potato. In many lowland regions, sago palm was the major cultivated starch staple.

One of the attributes of plant food production is that it helps support more sedentary populations with higher population densities and increased territoriality. By 4,000 years ago evidence for intensified use of the Highland valleys exists in the form of a move away from rockshelter encampments to permanently occupied villages supported by agriculture with concomitant increases in territoriality.³⁵ The pace of social change picked up in the past couple of thousand years with the introduction of the pig and again around 500 years ago with the introduction of South American sweet potato, which was grown in surplus as fodder to support large herds of domesticated pigs that were husbanded as prestige items for ceremonial exchanges and associated feasting.³⁶ Such competitive ceremonial practices were central to the development of ethnographically known intense and elaborate social interactions between highly territorial and warring tribal groups in the Highlands and the development of Big Man societies. At the time of first contact with the outside world in the 1930s, the Highlands region of New Guinea was home to around 1 million people with population densities of up to 300 people per square kilometre. A broad array of prestige

34 Tim Denham and Simon Haberle, 'Agricultural Emergence and Transformation in the Upper Waghi Valley, Papua New Guinea, during the Holocene: Theory, Method and Practice', *The Holocene* 18 (2008): 481–96.

35 Paula Brown, *Highland Peoples of New Guinea* (Cambridge University Press, 1978); Denham and Haberle, 'Agricultural Emergence'; and Virginia D. Watson and J. David Cole, *Prehistory of the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977).

36 Jack Golson and D. S. Gardner, 'Agriculture and Socio-Political Organisation in New Guinea Highlands Prehistory', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990): 395–417.

wealth-goods was also involved in competitive ceremonial exchange networks involving Highland valley communities, centring on shell valuables (traded up from the coast), large stone axes, bird-of-paradise feathers, salt, etc. Stone-axe production in the Western Highlands has been documented at ethnographically known quarries dating back to 1,000–2,500 years ago. Axes from these quarries, produced at rates of up to 1,000 per year by 200 men working full-time for four months in shafts up to 15 metres deep, entered into local ceremonial exchange networks as prestigious items (e.g. bride price) and also moved up to 350 kilometres away along trade routes down into lowland regions.³⁷

On the coastal lowlands of north-east Papua New Guinea, systems of exchange began intensifying considerably with the emergence of Lapita maritime peoples around 3,500 years ago. Lapita peoples are identified archaeologically by the presence of earthenware pottery decorated with finely executed, dentate-stamped designs and motifs. The development of what has become known as the Lapita Cultural Complex occurred across islands of the Bismarck Archipelago of north-east PNG and is linked to the movement and accommodation of Austronesian-speaking people into the region from island South-East Asia. Lapita maritime peoples then moved out to the previously uninhabited islands of Remote Oceania, appearing around 3,200 years ago in the eastern Solomon Islands before moving on to Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji around 3,000 years ago, and out into Western Polynesia and the central Pacific nations of Tonga around 2,900 years ago and Samoa around 2,700 years ago. By 2,900 years ago, Lapita peoples had also migrated southwards to the southern mainland coast of PNG where they negotiated settlement amongst existing resident peoples. While Lapita pottery continued through to c. 2,200 years ago in Near Oceania, in Remote Oceania Lapita pottery lasted only for 200–300 years. Apart from distinctive pottery, characteristic features of the Lapita Cultural Complex included use of obsidian for flaked tools, and the manufacture of clam shell adzes, shell fishhooks and cone shell arm rings. Subsistence practices focused on agriculture and the use of marine resources (e.g. fish, sharks, turtles, shellfish) from coastal settlements, including stilt villages and hamlets over reef platforms. Lapita peoples most likely introduced to Oceania the pig, dog, chicken, Pacific rat, at least fifteen plant species

37 John Burton, 'Repeng and the Salt-Makers: "Ecological Trade" and Stone Axe Production in the Papua New Guinea Highlands', *Man* 24 (1989): 255–72.

(including cultivated taro, yams and bananas) and probably outrigger sailing canoes.³⁸

Similarity in the Lapita Cultural Complex across some 4,500 kilometres of the western Pacific reveals considerable information flow and networking between numerous communities. In many respects, these networks had antecedents in the ancient exchange networks of the Bismarck Archipelago, where movement of obsidian and live animals over hundreds of kilometres between islands extends back into the Pleistocene and more than 20,000 years ago. In addition, between 8,000 and 3,000 years ago, stone mortars and pestles of probable ritual significance were used across a large area of New Guinea over a distance spanning at least 1,000 kilometres. Such shared stylistic practices point to large-scale social networks and cultural interaction spheres.³⁹ These exchange networks were transformed, elaborated and expanded during Lapita times and were critical to the success of colonising populations in terms of establishing viable communities on newly discovered islands. For example, obsidian found in multiple layers of Lapita sites in the Reef/Santa Cruz islands (Solomon Islands) shows continuing (albeit indirect) connections with quarry sources and 'homeland' communities in the Bismarck Archipelago located 2,000 kilometres to the north-west. Similar obsidian was transported over immense distances to Vanuatu (2,400 km), New Caledonia (2,900 km) and Fiji (3,300 km).⁴⁰ Bismarck obsidian found 3,500 kilometres to the west in Borneo in South-East Asia reveals that the reach of Lapita-period networks spanned a distance of nearly 7,000 kilometres.⁴¹ As such, social organisation of Lapita communities extended well beyond the confines of villages and crossed hundreds of kilometres of ocean. This called for skilled leaders to negotiate complex socio-political interactions, manage ceremonial exchange systems and maintain kinship ties between distant communities. Such interpersonal skills no doubt provided the basis of status, authority and ranking in Lapita communities. The

38 Patrick V. Kirch, *The Lapita Peoples: Ancestors of the Oceanic World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); Roger C. Green, 'The Lapita Horizon and Traditions: Signatures for One Set of Oceanic Migrations', in Christophe Sand (ed.), *Pacific Archaeology: Assessments and Prospects* (Nouméa: Département Archéologie, Services des Musées et du Patrimoine de Nouvelle-Calédonie, 2003); and Christophe Sand and Stuart Bedford, 'Lapita, Archaeological Signature of the First Austronesian Settlement of Southwest Pacific', in Christophe Sand and Stuart Bedford (eds.), *Lapita: Oceanic Ancestors* (Paris: Musée du Quai Branley, 2010).

39 Robin Torrence and Pamela Swadling, 'Social Networks and the Spread of Lapita', *Antiquity* 82 (2008): 600–16.

40 Summerhayes, 'Obsidian Network Patterns'.

41 Peter Bellwood and Peter Koon, 'Lapita Colonists Leave Boats Unburned! The Questions of Lapita Links with Island South East Asia', *Antiquity* 63 (1989): 613–22.

ceremonial complexity of Lapita people's lives extended to mortuary practices, as evidenced at the Teouma cemetery on Efate in Vanuatu, where numerous bodies occur with elaborately decorated Lapita pots, some of which contained skulls.

We have only a rudimentary understanding of the development of social formations over the past thousand years across most of Melanesia. What seems clear is that the homogeneity of the Lapita era transforms over time into more heterogeneous cultural practices, including stylistically distinct pottery traditions with simpler designs. On many Melanesian islands, post-Lapita communities expand inland and social networks became increasingly regional in flavour. Longevity of occupation also increasingly manifests in notions of ancestral and genealogical connections to regions, with concomitant ceremonial practices. It is in this connection that significant archaeological insights have been made into historicising the emergence of ethnographically known practices. An excellent example in this regard is the *hiri* trade system of the Gulf of Papua on the south coast of Papua New Guinea. Late nineteenth- and twentieth-century recordings indicate that every year Western Motu peoples of the Port Moresby region undertook large-scale trading expeditions in large double-hulled canoes (*lagatoi*) westwards along the Gulf of Papua, visiting coastal villages up to 500 kilometres distant. In addition to locally made shell valuables and stone axes obtained from inland peoples, the key Motu trade item was the earthenware cooking pot. Up to 30,000 pots were manufactured annually by women in local villages for these expeditions and transported by a fleet of around 20 *lagatoi*, each crewed by about twenty men (see Fig. 22.4). In return for pots, the Motu obtained sago-palm starch (up to 600 tonnes) processed by women and canoe hulls made by men. Motu oral histories speak of the legendary beginnings of the *hiri* 300–500 years ago (calculated from genealogies). Excavation of numerous village sites along the Gulf of Papua has revealed thousands of sherds of *hiri* ceramics also dating to the past 400–500 years.⁴²

Roviana Lagoon on the south coast of New Georgia in the Solomon Islands provides another example of regional developments in socio-political and ceremonial complexity within the past thousand years. Ethnographically, it is known that people lived in numerous villages and hamlets around the edge of the lagoon, with subsistence focused on marine protein and cultivation of taro, yams, bananas and sago. Communities were structured

42 David Frankel and Jim Rhoads (eds.), *Archaeology of a Coastal Exchange System: Sites and Ceramics of the Papuan Gulf* (Canberra: Division of Archaeology and Natural History, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University, 1994).



Figure 22.4 *Lagatoi* trading vessel with smaller canoe loaded with pots, and stilt village over water in background, Port Moresby area (from Lindt 1887)

into chiefdoms with leaders who orchestrated intergroup socio-political dynamics centred on headhunting raids (involving up to 500 men over distances of 200 km) and on complex exchange networks with shell valuables. The power and authority of hereditary chiefs was legitimised and sanctioned by the ancestors whose skulls were venerated at shrines (*hope*) with valuable shell (*poata*) votive offerings. Chiefly authority was also enshrined by trophy skulls kept in canoe-houses along with the large war canoes (*tomoko*) used in the headhunting raids. Hundreds of shrines located around the lagoon track the development of the Roviana chiefdom and regional polity over the past 700 years.⁴³ Around 400 years ago shrine construction was elaborated considerably to include wharves, canoe-houses, fortifications and hundreds of coral-rubble shrines containing human remains (including ancestor skulls and skulls taken on headhunting raids) and shell valuables.

43 Richard Walter and Peter Sheppard, 'Archaeology in Melanesia; A Case Study from the Western Province of the Solomon Islands', in Ian Lilley (ed.), *Archaeology of Oceania: Australia and the Pacific Islands* (Carlton, Vic.: Blackwell, 2006); and Richard Walter and Peter Sheppard, 'Nusa Roviana: The Archaeology of a Melanesian Chiefdom', *Journal of Field Archaeology* 27 (2000): 295–318.

The enduring presence and power of the dead amongst the living is also illustrated dramatically by Roi Mata's burial site on Retoka Island in Vanuatu. Oral history recalls the burial of Roi Mata, a legendary paramount chief who was interred around 400 years ago, along with about fifty men and women, many elaborately adorned with carved shell and tooth valuables. It is believed that many of the accompanying burials represent sacrificial representatives from various clans brought under Roi Mata's control. The sacrificed men may have been drugged with kava, but it appears the women were buried alive.⁴⁴

Polynesia

Polynesia takes in most of Remote Oceania, and its seafaring pioneers established the last great chapter in the human colonisation of the globe. Archaeologists have discovered that after settling in Tonga and Samoa for at least 1,500 years, descendants of Lapita peoples began migrating to the north, west and south across vast expanses of ocean to establish the more than thirty closely related Polynesian languages and societies we know today. Similarly, many Polynesians today recall in oral histories, traditional stories and songs their ancestral homeland of *Hawaiki* – taking in Samoa and Tonga and the surrounding islands of Western Polynesia. Similarities in Polynesian societies reflect largely the shallow time-depth (< 1,000 years ago) of their origins in *Hawaiki*.⁴⁵ These similarities include hereditary chiefdoms with communities structured around the chief's extended household, religious structures, commoner households and associated agricultural gardens. Some Polynesian communities also back-migrated westwards into Melanesia (e.g. Tikopia in the Solomon Islands), reinforcing the complex, overlapping and fluid boundary between Melanesia and Polynesia.⁴⁶

Large double-hulled canoes are a distinctive ethnographic feature of Polynesian life and were central to the successful and purposeful open-ocean voyaging that permitted the colonisation of Polynesia.⁴⁷ The foundations of Polynesian society emerged in Western Polynesia (*Hawaiki*) following initial Lapita settlement around 2,900 years ago. As pottery was mostly dropped

44 Matthew Spriggs, *The Island Melanesians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 207–12.

45 Patrick V. Kirch and Roger C. Green, *Ancestral Polynesia: An Essay in Historical Anthropology* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

46 Spriggs, *The Island Melanesians*, chapter 7.

47 Geoff Irwin, *The Prehistoric Exploration and Colonisation of the Pacific* (Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Kerry R. Howe (ed.), *Vaka Moana: Voyages of the Ancestors* (Auckland: David Bateman Ltd. and Auckland Museum, 2006).

from the local cultural repertoire by around 1,500 years ago, subsequent colonisers moving out into the remainder of Polynesia were essentially aceramic. The timing of this subsequent dispersal is hotly debated by archaeologists and is complicated by the fact that hard evidence for earliest settlement in the form of artefacts often marginally post-dates putative evidence for the beginnings of human environmental impacts. A recent synthesis argues that the earliest evidence for the settlement of East Polynesia began with movements out to the Society Islands ~1000–900 years ago, followed by the near-instantaneous settlement of the Marquesas, Hawaii and Rapa Nui ~800–700 years ago, and finally New Zealand in the South Pacific Ocean by 700 years ago.⁴⁸ Hundreds of subtropical to subantarctic islands were colonised over a rapid phase of a few centuries. At least twenty-five of these islands reveal short-lived occupation and long abandonment by the time of European discovery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴⁹ The possible pre-Columbian presence of sweet potato in East Polynesia and Polynesian chickens in Chile suggests Polynesian dispersals may have extended a further 3,000 kilometres east of Rapa Nui to South America.⁵⁰ While it has long been considered plausible that Melanesian and Polynesian seafarers reached the east coast of Australia, a lack of archaeological evidence of such visits suggests that viable social relationships were not established with resident Aboriginal peoples.⁵¹ Pottery of apparent Melanesian form found recently on Lizard Island off the north Queensland coast may provide the first solid evidence of such contacts.⁵²

48 Janet M. Wilmshurst, Atholl J. Anderson, Thomas F. G. Higham and Trevor H. Worthy, 'Dating the Late Prehistoric Dispersal of Polynesians to New Zealand Using the Commensal Pacific Rat', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 105 (2008): 7676–80; and Janet M. Wilmshurst, Terry L. Hunt, Carl P. Lipo and Atholl J. Anderson, 'High-Precision Radiocarbon Dating Shows Recent and Rapid Initial Human Colonization of East Polynesia', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 108 (2011): 1815–20.

49 Atholl Anderson, 'Faunal Collapse, Landscape Change and Settlement History in Remote Oceania', *World Archaeology* 33 (2002): 375–90.

50 Chris Ballard, Paula Brown, R. Michael Bourke and Tracy Harwood (eds.), *The Sweet Potato in Oceania: A Reappraisal*, Oceania Monographs 56 (University of Sydney, 2005); Alice A. Storey, José M. Ramírez, Daniel Quiroz, David V. Burley, David J. Addison, Richard Walter, Atholl J. Anderson, Terry L. Hunt, J. Stephen Athens, Leon Huynen and Elizabeth A. Matisoo-Smith, 'Radiocarbon and DNA Evidence for a Pre-Columbian Introduction of Polynesian Chickens to Chile', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 104 (2007): 10335–39; and Terry L. Jones, Alice A. Storey, Elizabeth A. Matisoo-Smith and José M. Ramírez-Aliaga, *Polynesians in America: Pre-Columbian contacts with the New World* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2011).

51 Irwin, *The Prehistoric Exploration*, p. 100.

52 Clare Tochilin, William R. Dickinson, Matthew W. Felgate, Mark Pecha, Peter Sheppard, Frederick H. Damon, Simon Bickler and George E. Gehrels,

Like their Lapita forebears to the west, Polynesian colonisers brought to their new island homes a range of plants and animals to establish culturally modified landscapes suitable for permanent occupation. Pigs, dogs and chickens were selectively moved around the Pacific by people, as were agricultural products such as sweet potatoes, bananas and taro. Some introduced animals, such as the Pacific rat (*Rattus exulans*), had major unintended impacts on island ecosystems. Indeed, the Pacific rat took such a liking to birds' eggs that it resulted in the extinction of perhaps 2,000 species of birds, representing 20 per cent of the world's bird species.⁵³ The most dramatic example of Polynesian impact on bird populations is New Zealand, where, within 300 years of arrival, ancestral Maori had contributed to the extinction of all species of flightless moa, including the 4-metre-high *Dinornis giganteus*. Although early New Zealand sites are filled with moa bones attesting to the subsistence importance of moa, it is also clear that forest clearance for horticulture and associated landscape-firing contributed to moa extinction. Indeed, it is estimated that nearly half of New Zealand's forests were transformed into grasslands, fernlands and scrublands by Maori firing practices.⁵⁴ Apart from clearance for cultivation, landscape-firing was also aimed at promoting the major expansion of bracken fern fields (an important starch food staple). Equally dramatic landscape modification has been documented on Rapa Nui, where by the time Europeans found their way there in the seventeenth century, some twenty species of trees had disappeared in the wake of Polynesian settlement. While such deforestation certainly resulted in new ecological relationships for residents, its causal association with societal collapse has been overstated and the more devastating impacts of European contact underestimated.⁵⁵

Ethnographic evidence suggests that Polynesians of recent times did not engage in long-distance exchange systems and alliance networks on the same

'Sourcing Temper Sands in Ancient Ceramics with U-Pb Ages of Detrital Zircons: A Southwest Pacific Test Case', *Journal of Archaeological Science* 39 (2012): 2583–91.

53 Richard P. Duncan, Alison G. Boyer and Tim M. Blackburn, 'Magnitude and Variation of Prehistoric Bird Extinctions in the Pacific', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 110 (2013): 6436–41; and David W. Steadman, 'Prehistoric Extinctions of Pacific Island Birds: Biodiversity Meets Zooarchaeology', *Science* 267 (1995): 1123–31.

54 David B. McWethy, Cathy Whitlock, Janet M. Wilmshurst, Matt S. McGlone and Xun Li, 'Rapid Deforestation of South Island, New Zealand, by Early Polynesian Fires', *The Holocene* 19 (2009): 883–97; and Matt S. McGlone, 'Polynesian Deforestation of New Zealand: A Preliminary Synthesis', *Archaeology in Oceania* 18 (1983): 23.

55 Terry L. Hunt and Carl P. Lipo, 'Revisiting Rapa Nui (Easter Island) "Ecocide"', *Pacific Science* 63 (2009): 601–16.

scale as those documented across Australia and Melanesia.⁵⁶ The social structure of Polynesian societies meant that the movement of goods related mostly to gifting at marriages and tribute paid to chiefs.⁵⁷ In New Zealand, exchange (especially reciprocal gifting) was more highly developed and was structured in part by ecological differences and focused on foodstuffs and tools (e.g. stone adzes) moving between communities, especially between coastal and inland villages. In some cases, exchange involved prestigious objects, such as those made from greenstone. Archaeological research reveals that adzes made from special sources and quarries of basalt, argillite or nephrite were traded over large areas of New Zealand over the past 700 years.⁵⁸ A similarly elaborate exchange system operated historically between Samoa, Tonga and Fiji.⁵⁹ Across other parts of Polynesia, archaeological research also reveals that peoples in the ancient past did travel across the ocean moving stone artefacts and pottery between widely spaced communities. For example, during the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, basalt adzes manufactured in the Marquesas were moved across the sea 1,425 kilometres to the Society Islands to the south-west and 1,750 kilometres to Mangareva in French Polynesia to the south-east. Similarly, Hawaiian oral history of voyaging to Tahiti matches geochemical sourcing of a basalt adze found on Napuka, a low coral atoll in the Tuamotu Archipelago of French Polynesia, to Kaho'olawe in the Hawaiian Islands located 4,000 kilometres or ~32 days' sailing to the north. Basalt adzes and pottery dating to ~600–700 years ago found in the Cook Islands have been sourced to Samoa and Tonga respectively, located 1,700 kilometres to the west.⁶⁰ These results are seen to reveal the existence of inter-archipelago interaction spheres operating across central Polynesia up until ~500 years ago, after which island communities became more independent and self-contained.⁶¹

56 Marshall I. Weisler, 'Hard Evidence for Prehistoric Interaction in Polynesia', *Current Anthropology* 39 (1998): 521–32.

57 Oliver, *Oceania*.

58 Peter J. Sheppard, 'Moving Stones: Comments on the Archaeology of Spatial Interaction in New Zealand', in Louise Furey and Simon Holdaway (eds.), *Change Through Time: 50 Years of New Zealand Archaeology* (Auckland: New Zealand Archaeological Association, 2004).

59 Adrienne L. Kaeppler, 'Exchange Patterns in Goods and Spouses: Fiji, Tonga and Samoa', *Mankind* 11 (1978): 246–52.

60 Richard Walter and William R. Dickinson, 'A Ceramic Sherd from Ma'uuke in the Southern Cook Islands', *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 98 (1989): 465–70; and Richard Walter and Peter J. Sheppard, 'The Ngati Tiare Adze Cache: Further Evidence of Prehistoric Contact between West Polynesia and the Southern Cook Islands', *Archaeology in Oceania* 31 (1996): 33–39.

61 Weisler, 'Hard Evidence'; and Kenneth D. Collerson and Marshall I. Weisler, 'Stone Adze Compositions and the Extent of Ancient Polynesian Voyaging and Trade', *Science* 317 (2007): 1907–11.

The hierarchical and stratified nature of many Polynesian societies with paramount chiefs and priesthoods, and monumental stone structures and irrigation works, was elaborated after initial settlement. There is a broad correlation between the degree of socio-political stratification in Polynesian societies and population size and density.⁶² Much ceremonial activity (including large-scale tribute offerings) was associated with chiefs, particularly paramount chiefs, who were leaders with spiritual power (*mana*) descended directly from the gods. While small-scale chiefdoms on atolls involved communities of a few hundred people, the complex stratified paramount chiefdoms of Tonga, Samoa, Hawaii and the Society Islands involved polities with tens of thousands of people. These empires were highly territorial and militaristic and represented the most formal and stratified polities and ranked societies developed in Oceania. The historically known Tongan maritime empire involved 30,000–40,000 people and centred on Tongatapu chiefs exacting tribute from numerous island communities across 800 km² of sea. Associated monumental structures on Tongatapu include elaborate chiefly tombs using cut blocks of stone weighing up to 50 tonnes and a canoe-wharf complex involving land reclamation and over 100,000 m³ of fill. All of this dates back 500–600 years.⁶³ In Hawaii, four separate island paramount chiefdoms taking in around 200,000 people were integrated into an empire under the divine kingship of Kamehameha I in the early nineteenth century. The basis of the kingdom, with islands comprising multiple territorial districts (*moku*) and coterminous chiefdoms collectively ruled by paramount chiefs, emerged ~600–350 years ago.⁶⁴ Vast numbers of elaborate stone structures associated with agricultural terraces, irrigation channels, aquaculture ponds and temple complexes (*heiau*) attest to the monumental dimensions of Hawaiian chiefly power and associated control of resources, labour and ceremonies. On Rapa Nui between ~800 and 500 years ago, chiefs held sway over hundreds of individual coastal territorial districts (*kainga*) consisting of a village with commoners' houses, houses of the chief and priests, and monumental stone plazas (*ahu*) upon which were erected huge anthropomorphic stone carvings (*moai*) weighing up to 80 tonnes. Of the over 500 *moai* recorded, ~200 remain unfinished in the Rano Raraku basalt quarry. In New

62. Patrick V. Kirch, *The Evolution of the Polynesian Chiefdoms* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 98–99.

63. Geoff Clark, David Burley and Tim Murray, 'Monumentality and the Development of the Tongan Maritime Chiefdom', *Antiquity* 82 (2008): 994–1008.

64. Patrick V. Kirch, *How Chiefs Became Kings: Divine Kingship and the Rise of Archaic States in Ancient Hawai'i* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

Zealand, with a population of around 100,000 people at European contact, chiefly power and associated militarisation and monumentalism were expressed by the large-scale reforming of hills into some 6,000 elaborately terraced and fortified villages (*pa*), particularly within the past 400 years.

Micronesia

To the north of Melanesia are the islands of Micronesia, a diverse cultural domain with Austronesian linguistic affiliations with island South-East Asia for the western archipelagos (Marianas and Palau Islands) and with the Pacific for the central and eastern archipelagos (Yap, Caroline, Marshall and Kiribati Islands). Like many other Pacific island societies, Micronesians were marine subsistence specialists in terms of protein (supplemented by introduced pigs, dogs and chickens in some cases) along with introduced crops of taro, yams and breadfruit (and possibly rice in the west). As with Polynesians, Micronesians were master mariners who used elaborately constructed outrigger canoes with sophisticated sails, rigging and navigational systems to voyage between islands and across the ocean. The political arrangement of villages focused on extended family households with various degrees of social ranking, including hereditary chiefs.

The history of human occupation of Micronesia is recent (<4,000 years) and in part reflects corresponding cultural developments in South-East Asia, Melanesia and Polynesia.⁶⁵ The earliest evidence comes from the western archipelagos, where pottery dating back to ~3,500 years ago points to connections across 1,800 kilometres of sea with South-East Asia and peoples who were ancestral to those that had moved into north-east PNG around the same time and gave rise to the Lapita Cultural Complex. In contrast, initial settlement of the central and eastern archipelagos tended to be more recent (2,000 years ago) by colonising peoples from Melanesian islands to the south. Many of these early sites are considered to have been stilt villages established across intertidal reefs.

The past 1,500 years of Micronesian history sees increased development of regional cultural diversity that merges into the complex array of societies recorded at European contact in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The most obvious of these regional developments relates to the emergence of monumental architecture akin to that seen across Polynesia. The celebrated examples of this architecture include the stone pillar (*latte*) structures of the Mariana Islands, monumental terracing in the Palau Islands and basalt-column

65 Paul Rainbird, *The Archaeology of Micronesia* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).



Figure 22.5 Monumental structures at Nan Madol, Pohnpei, 2004 (Photograph by Glenn R. Summerhayes)

structures of Pohnpei and Kosrae in the eastern Caroline Islands. The *latte* stone pillar structures are made from quarried limestone, sandstone or basalt. They have a hemispherical capstone, tend to be less than 2.5 metres in height and were arranged into paired rows of six to fourteen pillars. They were made between ~1000 and ~400 years ago and from Spanish accounts were used to support wooden buildings to house people and even large canoes. The association of burials of men and women with many *latte* in coastal settings suggests a connection with ancestral power and territoriality. Sourcing of stone artefacts reveals some inter-island exchange and social relationships between various *latte* communities. The famous large-scale monumental structures at Nan Madol on Pohnpei are associated with expanding chiefly architecture and centralised political control legitimated by ancestors (Fig. 22.5). The site complex consists of ninety-three artificial islets resting on fringing reef that were constructed variously between about 1,500 and 800 years ago, with major use ceasing around 400 years ago. The basalt structures include walls up to 9 metres high, elite tombs of ancestors, and residences of chiefs and their specialist entourages.⁶⁶

66 J. Stephen Athens, 'The Rise of the Saudeleur: Dating the Nan Madol Chiefdom, Pohnpei', in Atholl Anderson, Kaye Green and Foss Leach (eds.), *Vastly Ingenious: The Archaeology of Pacific Material Culture in Honour of Janet M. Davidson* (Dunedin, New Zealand: Otago University Press, 2007); and Rainbird, *The Archaeology of Micronesia*.

That many of the islands of Micronesia were connected through social alliances and associated exchange networks is exemplified by the so-called Yapese Empire. The paramount chief of the Gagil district of Yap controlled an exchange system known as *sawei* that included fifteen atoll communities located across 1,300 kilometres of ocean and the Caroline Islands.⁶⁷ *Sawei* is the largest historically known exchange system in Micronesia and included items such as shell valuables, fibre shirts, rope and turtle-shell belts coming into Yap and items including ceramic pots, pigments, clam shells and turmeric used in ceremonies and a broad range of foodstuffs coming out of Yap. This reciprocal exchange system created social relationships and alliances between widely separated communities, which, *inter alia*, allowed groups to draw on neighbouring groups during food shortages. Another exchange network linked Yap to islands to the west, including Palau, where limestone was quarried to carve into small and large discs which were canoed over 300 kilometres across to Yap as a form of 'stone money'. Intensified movement of Yapese pottery across the Caroline Islands around 600 years ago may mark the beginnings of the *sawei* exchange system.⁶⁸

Conclusion

The human history of Oceania ranges from at least 50,000 years ago in Australia/New Guinea to a mere 700 years in New Zealand. Despite the vastly different types of societies that developed across Oceania, all had in common various degrees of interactions with neighbours near and far. The histories of these exchange systems and associated social networks provide important and revealing insights into historical developments and changes within and between communities, and into people–people and people–environment relationships. Whereas in the Pleistocene, long-distance exchange systems were developed in part in response to low population densities and highly dispersed communities, in the late Holocene the development of systems of exchange related more to the management of high population densities and frequent contact between numerous, contiguous communities. In many cases, such networks and alliances were strategic developments to help obviate risks associated with environmental

67 William A. Lessa, 'Ulithi and the Outer Native World', *American Anthropologist* 52 (1950), 27–52.

68 Patrick V. Kirch, *On the Road of the Winds: An Archaeological History of the Pacific Islands before European Contact* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 192–93; and Rainbird, *The Archaeology of Micronesia*, p. 160.

fluctuations and resource stress. The high level of secular, religious and ritual knowledge and energy required to orchestrate, manage and control such complex social relations required skilled leadership and provided the basis for authority. Thus for Aboriginal Australians, population increases and intensified social interactions of the past 3,000 years paralleled increasing social complexity and hierarchy expressed materially through objects associated with exchange and rituals, and sites associated with social gatherings, ceremonies and feasting. Similar developments also took place amongst agricultural island societies of Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia over the past 3,000 years, but elaborated to include more energy-consuming and formalised hierarchical structures and labour-intensive monumental ceremonial sites to support chiefly elites and help manage high population densities and numbers. Whereas governance in Aboriginal societies centred on acquired status and leadership based upon negotiation skills and the strategic use and control of secular and religious knowledge and resources, in Remote Oceania governance was specialised, institutionalised, hierarchical and usually involved hereditary chiefs. These were the worlds encountered by the British explorer and master mariner Lt. James Cook as he sailed through the Pacific on his voyages of discovery in the late eighteenth century.

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Africa: states, empires, and connections

STANLEY BURSTEIN

Ancient Africa occupies a peculiar place in the scholarship on world history. After detailed accounts of human evolution in Sub-Saharan Africa and the spread of *Homo sapiens sapiens* from Africa throughout Eurasia and the Americas, treatment of the history of the continent beyond a few privileged places – Egypt, Nubia, and Aksum – virtually ceases until roughly the late first millennium CE or sometimes even later. The author¹ of a widely read history of the world offered the following rationale for this situation: “the early history of even such huge areas as black Africa or pre-Columbian America are only lightly sketched in these pages, because nothing that happened there between very remote times and the coming of Europeans shaped the world.”

Like most half-truths, this one misleads as much as it illuminates. Sub-Saharan Africa was isolated from Eurasia, but much less completely than is often believed.² For much of the Holocene, in fact, archaeological evidence points to significant interaction between the continent and neighboring regions of Eurasia. Examples are easy to find. The branch of proto-Afro-Asiatic that gave rise to the Semitic languages spread to southwest Asia, as did the domesticated donkey. Even more remarkable, several domesticated sub-Saharan grains, including sorghum, somehow had reached South Asia by c. 2000 BCE.

Nor did such exchanges go in one direction. Indian humped cattle may have reached Africa as early as the beginning of the second millennium BCE, while west Asian plant and animal domesticates such as wheat and barley spread to Egypt and Nubia. Sheep and goats also spread throughout the Nile Valley and North Africa and even crossed the Sahara, becoming a staple of

1 John Morris Roberts, *The New Penguin History of the World*, 4th edn. (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. xiii.

2 The evidence for relations between Africa and the rest of Eurasia in antiquity is summarized in Peter Mitchell, *African Connections: Archaeological Perspectives on Africa and the Wider World* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005).

West African and, later, African agriculture in general. Almost certainly, cultural interaction between Africa and western Asia was not limited to the exchange of these few plant and animal domesticates. Unfortunately, evidence has allowed only a number of parallels between the cultures of early dynastic Egypt and those of the prehistoric Sahara and Nubia to be identified.³

Be that as it may, relations between Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa and western Asia changed dramatically during the third millennium BCE. The cause was the end of the Holocene wet phase about 3000 BCE. By 2000 BCE aridity comparable to that prevalent in the region today had dried up water sources throughout the Sahara, emptying it of people except for the inhabitants of the few remaining oases and inhibiting contact between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa for over 2,000 years.

Isolation, however, did not mean stagnation. North and south of the Sahara economic and social development proceeded apace. By the time contact was gradually reestablished in the late first millennium BCE and the first millennium CE, socio-cultural evolution had generated conditions in both regions that were strikingly similar. Over much of the continent, mixed economies that combined farming with pastoralism and were supported by iron-based technologies were the norm. Cities, which were established in North Africa during the first half of the first millennium BCE, had also begun to appear south of the Sahara in the first millennium BCE and became increasingly significant in the first millennium CE. Similarly, large states, which dominate the history of North Africa in antiquity, had also begun to play a similar role in the history of the Sahel and West Africa by the end of the first millennium CE (see Map 23.1). This is a remarkable story, but telling it is difficult not only because of its vast scale and complexity but also because of the nature of the available sources and the peculiarities of ancient Africa's historiography.

Sources and historiography

Raymond Mauny, the great French historian of Medieval Africa, entitled his history of ancient Africa *Les siècles obscurs de l'Afrique*,⁴ *The Dark Centuries of*

3 Christopher Ehret, "The African Sources of Egyptian Language and Culture," in Joseph Cervelló Autuori (ed.), *Africa Antigua: El Antiguo Egipto, Una Civilización Africana* (Barcelona: Editorial AUSA, 2001), pp. 121–28; Toby Wilkinson, *Genesis of the Pharaohs: Dramatic New Discoveries Rewrite the Origins of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005).

4 Raymond Mauny, *Les siècles obscurs de l'Afrique* (Paris: Fayard, 1970).



Map 23.1 Africa in antiquity. (Arrows refer to Bantu migrations.)

Africa, dark, of course, not because nothing important happened but because of the lack of written sources. Although written sources for ancient African history exist in a variety of languages, including Egyptian, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Phoenician, Berber, Meroitic, Ge'ez, and Arabic, until the late first millennium CE their coverage is limited to North Africa, the Nile Valley, and the Red Sea and its hinterlands. Equally important, outside the Nile Valley

and the Red Sea basin, virtually all written sources reflect the point of view of outsiders instead of native Africans.

The deficiencies of the ancient written sources are aggravated by the lack of a historiography dealing with Africa as a whole. Instead, each region has its own historiography with its own distinctive issues and methodologies. Northeast Africa, which has separate scholarly traditions for ancient Egypt, Nubia, and Aksum, is the most extreme example but not the only one. The situation is similar throughout North Africa, where up to the 1960s scholarship emphasized the Mediterranean aspects of the region's history, reflecting the tendency of French and Italian intellectuals to view their countries as taking up Rome's imperial mission in Africa. And everywhere, so long as the European empires lasted, racism encouraged the notion that native African peoples were incapable of original creation. Meanwhile, the new African historiography that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century concentrated on reconstructing the history of Sub-Saharan Africa while downplaying the possible significance of contacts with North and Northeast Africa before the late first millennium CE when they are documented in Arabic sources.⁵

As a result, historians' traditional preference for written sources combined with the already mentioned external biases tended to distort the history of ancient Africa in two ways: confusion of the date of the first mention in written sources of developments in the African interior with the date of their origin and too great a readiness to invoke foreign influence, be it Egyptian, Carthaginian, Greek, Roman, or Arab, as their explanation. While archaeology⁶ and linguistics⁷ have the potential to compensate for these deficiencies, their potential is only beginning to be realized. What follows, therefore, must be considered provisional, an interim report on the work in progress that is the history of ancient Africa.

5 Comprehensive syntheses of the early scholarship on ancient Africa are J. D. Fage (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 1978), vol. 11, and Gamal Mokhtar (ed.), *General History of Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), vol. 11.

6 David W. Phillipson, *African Archaeology*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Graham Connah, *African Civilizations: An Archaeological Perspective*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Ann Brower Stahl (ed.), *African Archaeology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); and Barbara E. Barich, *Antica Africa: Alle Origini delle Società* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2010).

7 Christopher Ehret, *An African Classical Age: Eastern and Southern Africa in World History, 1000 BC to AD 400* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), and Christopher Ehret, *History and the Testimony of Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

North Africa in the first millennium BCE

Egypt and Nubia

The twelfth century BCE was marked by a true “crisis of the old order” in western Asia and North Africa. Two great empires, those of the Hittites and the Egyptian New Kingdom, which had provided order in this vast region for almost three centuries, came under attack. The Hittites disappeared first, leaving in their wake a collection of petty kingdoms and city-states. Egypt, whose empire included Palestine and extended a thousand miles up to the Nile to the fourth cataract and west from Egypt almost to the Syrtes, the coastal region of the modern Gulf of Sidra, survived three attacks early in the century, one launched from the east by the Sea Peoples and two from the west by the Libyans allied with various sea raiders.

The Egyptian victories bought its empire another century of existence, but by the end of the New Kingdom in 1069 BCE it also had disappeared. Unlike the Hittites, the blow was self-inflicted, the result of a civil war caused by the attempt of Panehsy, the governor of Nubia, to seize control of Upper Egypt. Although Panehsy was driven out of Egypt, Egypt lost its vast Nubian empire and with it access to the products of the African interior and the gold that had made Egypt’s wealth legendary in the late second millennium BCE.

Egypt emerged from the struggle with Panehsy impoverished, divided, and under foreign rule for the first time in over half a millennium. The Pharaohs of the late New Kingdom had encouraged the settlement of Libyans in Egypt and the recruitment of Libyans into the Egyptian army. By the tenth century BCE, Libyans probably made up a majority of the Egyptian army and occupied high positions in the government. One of them, Shoshenq, seized the throne in 945 BCE, founding the twenty-second dynasty and opening a period of over 200 years of Libyan rule in Egypt.⁸

Although recognized as Pharaohs, the Libyans retained much of their own culture as evidenced by their non-Egyptian names, tribal titles, preference for oracular ratification of decisions, and, most important, the practice of granting offices, which then became hereditary, to kinsmen. Increasing political fragmentation was the inevitable result, until by the late eighth century BCE Egypt was divided into at least ten separate political units, four of which were ruled by

8 Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100–650 B C)*, 2nd edn. (Warminster: Aris and Phillips Ltd., 1986); Anthony Leahy (ed.), *Libya and Egypt c. 1300–750 B C* (London: SOAS Centre of Near and Middle Eastern Studies, 1990).

“kings.” A divided and weakened Egypt created opportunities throughout North Africa. The Nubians were the first to take advantage of them.⁹

The government of Egypt’s Nubian empire during the New Kingdom was complex, but critical to its success were local leaders in the central Sudan who had been co-opted into the system. The end of Egyptian rule freed them, and although the details are lost, American excavation of the royal cemetery at el-Kurru near the fourth cataract of the Nile documented the transformation of a regional chieftain into a king ruling in Egyptian style the entire Upper Nile Valley. The process began in the early ninth century BCE with burials in Nubian-style tumulus tombs and ended in the late eighth century BCE with Egyptian-style burials in pyramids.

Their kingdom was vast and complex, extending from the first cataract to somewhere south of the fifth cataract of the Nile. Most of its population were farmers, who lived in villages by the Nile, while tribes of transhumant pastoralists, who recognized the suzerainty of the kings of Kush, inhabited the eastern desert between the river and the Red Sea. Agricultural produce, supplemented by various products from the African interior including ivory, ebony, animals and their hides, and slaves together with gold from the eastern desert, underpinned the kingdom’s economy. Administration focused on a series of towns built around Egyptian-style temples between the third and fifth cataracts of the Nile, of which the most important was Napata, traditionally believed to be the southern home of the Theban god Amun and the site of the king’s coronation. At the top of the system was the king, who was chosen from a group of potential heirs whose mothers belonged to a privileged class of court women who held the title of king’s sister.

The Egyptianization of the Kushite monarchy reflected the establishment of close relations between the kings of Kush and the priesthood of Amun at Thebes, who relied on the Kushites for support against the Libyan kings in Lower Egypt. By the late eighth century BCE, alliance had led to conquest, with the Nubian king Shabako being crowned at Memphis as the first king of the twenty-fifth dynasty, which ruled Egypt for half a century.

The twenty-fifth dynasty marked a period of political and cultural revival in Egypt after the weakness of the period of Libyan rule. In Egypt, local dynasts were subordinated to royal authority and the military was strengthened. Temple construction and royal art revived. So did funerary and

9 The literature on the Kingdom of Kush is vast. Fundamental for the Napatan period are László Török, *The Kingdom of Kush: Handbook of the Napatan-Meroitic Civilization* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), vol. xxxi; and Robert G. Morkot, *The Black Pharaohs: Egypt’s Nubian Rulers* (London: The Rubicon Press, 2000).

theological literature, all of which were characterized by emulation of archaic Egyptian styles and high-quality workmanship.

The union of Egypt and Nubia virtually re-created the great empire of the New Kingdom. When, however, the kings of the twenty-fifth dynasty followed the example of their New Kingdom predecessors and tried to reassert Egyptian influence in Syria-Palestine, they collided with the Assyrians, who were expanding into the same area, with disastrous results. After three decades of on-again-off-again warfare against the kingdom of Israel and other Egyptian proxies in the region, the Assyrians invaded Egypt in force, first in 671 BCE and again in 667 BCE. Memphis and Thebes were sacked, the Kushite royal family was captured, and the king, Tarharqo, fled into Nubia, where he died in 664 BCE. A decade later his successor Tamwetamani was decisively defeated by Psamtek I, Assyria's client king of Egypt and the founder of the twenty-sixth dynasty; the union of Nubia and Egypt was at an end.

Despite its brevity – it lasted a little over a decade – the period of Assyrian rule brought critical changes to Northeast Africa. For Egypt it led to over a century of independence and prosperity under the rule of the twenty-sixth dynasty. Kush, on the other hand, lost its outlet to the Mediterranean. As a result, despite continuing to claim to be kings of Upper and Lower Egypt, Kushite kings henceforth ruled an inner African kingdom. Equally important, they faced a hostile Egypt – the twenty-sixth dynasty kings tried to eliminate all trace of their Nubian predecessors in Egypt – that reacted aggressively to any hint of Kushite moves to expand its influence toward the Egyptian border. Sometimes these tensions broke out into open warfare, as happened in 593 BCE when an Egyptian raid spread destruction throughout Nubia as far as the Kushite capital of Napata, destruction that is evidenced by the discovery of cachettes at Napata and near Kerma at the third cataract containing the fragments of royal statues smashed during the raid.¹⁰

Tension between the two kingdoms ended only with the Persian conquest of Egypt in 525 BCE. Their respective fates, however, differed. For Egypt, Persian conquest meant reduction to the status of a province – a satrapy – governed by a Persian satrap. For Kush the result was more complex.¹¹ Kush also felt the impact of Persian conquest, but, unlike Egypt, it didn't become a satrapy ruled by a Persian satrap. Instead, Kush continued to be ruled by its

¹⁰ Charles Bonnet and Dominique Valbelle, *Des Pharaons Venus d'Afrique: La cachette de Kerma* (Paris: Citadelles & Mazenod, 2005).

¹¹ For details see Stanley M. Burstein, "Herodotus and the Emergence of Meroe," in Stanley M. Burstein, *Graeco-Africana: Studies in the History of Greek Relations with Egypt and Nubia* (New Rochelle, NY: Caratzas, 1995), pp. 155–64.

own kings, but it was obligated to send to Persia as tribute characteristic products of its territory – gold, slaves, ebony, and animal products, which are depicted on the podium of the royal *apadana* at the Persian capital at Persepolis – and to provide troops for Persian armies if requested. Kush continued in this status until the end of the fifth century BCE when Persia lost control of Egypt, a situation that became permanent when Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire in the late 330s and early 320s BCE.

The significance of Alexander's conquest of the Persian Empire differed for Egypt and Kush. Egypt became again a major imperial power with an overseas empire that included much of the coastal regions of the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean basins. It did so, however, under the rule of the Macedonian dynasty of the Ptolemies and with a new ruling class composed of Greek immigrants. As in the case of Egypt, the fall of Persia confirmed the independence of Kush. Also like Egypt, the character of the ruling class changed. The Egyptianized elite that had dominated Kush since the foundation of the Kushite monarchy in the ninth century BCE was replaced by a new class with strong ties to the region around the new capital city of Meroe, south of the fifth cataract of the Nile. The change was not limited to government personnel, but it was reflected culturally by the replacement of Egyptian as the language of culture with Meroitic written in a new quasi-alphabetic script as the language of government, the new prominence of local Nubian gods such as the royal war god Apedemak in the Kushite pantheon, and the reappearance of the ancient funerary practice of burying members of the royal court with the king after his death (see Fig. 23.1).¹²

North Africa

Unfortunately, the situation in the rest of North Africa after the collapse of Egyptian influence in the region in the twelfth century BCE is less clear. As usual, the problem is the sources. While the evidence indicates that North Africa from the western border of Egypt to the Atlantic was inhabited by a variety of peoples speaking languages belonging to the Berber family of the Afro-Asiatic language family, native sources are virtually non-existent. Instead, scholars depend on external sources, Egyptian and, after the fifth century BCE, Greek and Roman, the focus of which is more ethnographic than historical.

12 For details see Peter Shinnie, *Meroe: A Civilization of the Sudan* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), and Stanley M. Burstein, "The Hellenistic Fringe: The Case of Meroe," in Burstein, *Graeco-Africana*, pp. 105–23.



Figure 23.1 Funeral pyramids and temples from Kingdom of Kush (800 BCE – 350 AD), necropolis on Island of Meroe (UNESCO World Heritage List, 2011), Sudan, Meroitic civilization (De Agostini Picture Library / C. Sappa / Bridgeman Images)

These sources do, however, allow a reconstruction of socio-political organization in North Africa at the beginning of the first millennium BCE.¹³

According to the fifth-century BCE Greek historian Herodotus¹⁴ the native peoples of North Africa were divided into two groups: pastoralists who inhabited the area between Egypt and the Syrtes, and agriculturalists living beyond the Syrtes, and Egyptian references to large herds of cattle in Libya confirm the existence of large-scale pastoralism in the regions bordering Egypt. While most of the region's inhabitants probably lived in villages, mention of towns in Egyptian texts and depictions of walled settlements in the area as early as c. 3000 BCE point to the existence of at least limited urbanism in North Africa by the end of the second millennium BCE. Centralized political institutions, however, were lacking in the region. The sources instead describe North Africa as divided between a small number of

13 David O'Connor, "The Nature of Tjemhu (Libyan) Society in the Later New Kingdom," in Leahy (ed.), *Libya and Egypt*, pp. 29–113.

14 Herodotus' evidence for the peoples of North Africa was collected and analyzed by Stéphane Gesell, *Hérodote* (Algiers: Adolphe Jourdan, 1916); and updated by Aldo Corcella in David Asheri, Alan B. Lloyd, and Aldo Corcella, *A Commentary on Herodotus Books I–IV* (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 669–721.

large tribes such as the Libu and the Meswesh in the second millennium BCE and the Musulami in the first millennium BCE. These tribes were not unified entities but segmental, alliances of regional tribes and sub-tribes united around charismatic leaders the sources call kings and their families. Although inherently unstable, the military potential of these tribal alliances, which was provided by elite chariotry in the late second millennium BCE and cavalry in the first millennium BCE, was considerable, as evidenced by their attacks on Egypt in the early twelfth millennium BCE and their formidable resistance to Carthaginian and Roman expansion in the first millennium BCE.

Greeks and Phoenicians in North Africa

While geography is not destiny, it does tend to focus activity more in some directions than others. For ancient Egypt that meant south toward Nubia, northeast toward Syria-Palestine, and east toward the Red Sea. The Persian and Macedonian conquests confirmed these trends. For North Africa the primary orientations were south toward the Sahara and ultimately the Sahel and north toward the Mediterranean, particularly the Mediterranean islands and the Iberian Peninsula. The failure of Persia to extend its power significantly west of Egypt combined with the settlement in North Africa of two peoples – Greeks and Phoenicians – who had begun expanding westward through the Mediterranean basin in the late ninth century BCE and strengthened the primarily north–south orientation of North African activity in the first millennium BCE.

Greek settlement in North Africa began c. 630 BCE with the foundation of the city of Cyrene on the Gebel Akhdar east of the Syrtes in modern Libya by settlers from the central Aegean island of Thera.¹⁵ Cyrene flourished almost immediately, becoming a major exporter of grain and a now extinct North African plant called Silphium, which was believed to have significant medicinal value, to the Aegean. As a result, Cyrene grew rapidly, founding four additional cities including Barca, modern Benghazi, in the region. Cyrene's relations with its Libyan neighbors quickly deteriorated also as a result of the city's rapid growth.

Initially Cyrene had been founded with the assistance of the Libyans, and intermarriage between Greeks and Libyans is attested throughout the city's history. Cyrene's rapid growth and agricultural expansion, however, created

15 John Boardman, *The Greeks Overseas: Their Early Colonies and Trade*, 4th edn. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), pp. 153–59; Michel Austin, "The Greeks in Libya," in Gocha R. Tsetskhladze (ed.), *Greek Colonisation: An Account of Greek Colonies and Other Settlements Overseas* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 187–217.

increased demands for additional land and labor to work it, thereby putting pressure on pastoralist populations living in the city's hinterland. This finally resulted in an unsuccessful attempt by the Libyans, in alliance with Egypt, c. 570 BCE to drive the Greeks out of Libya. The failure of the Libyan revolt enabled Cyrene and its subsidiary cities to continue to expand their agricultural territories into the interior and to bring under their rule the Libyan inhabitants of their hinterlands. Not surprisingly, hostilities between Cyrene and Libyans living further in the pre-desert zone, who remained free but threatened by the expansion of the city's agricultural territory, also continued intermittently until the early centuries CE.

Despite continued tension between Cyrene and her Libyan neighbors, the city also became a key link between the Mediterranean and the African interior by becoming the principal gateway for Greeks desiring to consult the famous oracle of the Egypto-Libyan god Ammon in the Oasis of Siwah, 200 miles south of the Mediterranean. By so doing, however, it also connected the Mediterranean basin to the caravan route that ran westward through a series of oases from the western desert of Egypt to the Niger River, thereby beginning the process of reconnecting North Africa to Sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁶ Although archaeological evidence for the use of this route in the early first millennium BCE is still lacking, the clear description of it in the work of the Greek historian Herodotus confirms that it was already known in the fifth century BCE.

The Phoenician impact on the peoples of North Africa began earlier than the Greek but was slower in developing.¹⁷ The reason is clear. For almost two centuries from their foundation in the early eighth century BCE, the first Phoenician settlements in the region – Utica and Carthage in Tunisia, Gades (Cadiz) in the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula, and Lixus on the Atlantic coast of Morocco – functioned primarily as links in the sea route that connected their mother city, Tyre, with the metal trade of the far western Mediterranean. Only with the Babylonian capture of Tyre in 574 BCE did the situation change with dramatic results.

Carthage quickly replaced Tyre as suzerain of the Phoenician settlements in North Africa.¹⁸ By the fifth century BCE, Carthaginian influence extended

16 Mario Liverani, "The Libyan Caravan Route in Herodotus IV. 181–185," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 43 (2000): 496–520.

17 Maria Eugenia Aubet, *The Phoenicians and the West: Politics, Colonies, and Trade*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

18 Serge Lancel, *Carthage: A History*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1992).

from Tunisia to the Atlantic in North Africa and across the Mediterranean to western Sicily and Sardinia. At home Carthage ceased paying tribute to its Libyan neighbors and expanded its territory south and west of Cape Bon, rapidly creating an empire that included all the Phoenician settlements between the Syrtes and the Atlantic.

The creation of the Carthaginian Empire spread Phoenician language, culture, and institutions throughout North Africa and transformed the social and cultural life of the region's Libyan populations. The results were most obvious in the cities of the Carthaginian Empire. These were ruled by an elite consisting of a mixture of Phoenicians and acculturated Libyans called Libyphoenicians by Greek and Roman writers, whose estates were worked by tributary Libyans. The military needs of the Carthaginian Empire also facilitated the emergence of the first Libyan kingdoms in North Africa.

Lacking sufficient manpower to meet its military needs, Carthage largely relied on mercenary and allied troops, infantry and especially cavalry. These troops were recruited from tribal alliances in Numidia, modern Algeria, and Mauretania, modern Morocco, and the chiefly families of the dominant tribes in these alliances, Mauri in Mauretania and the Massyli in Numidia, became the royal families of the new kingdoms. By the time these kingdoms appear in the sources in the late third century BCE, they were thoroughly Punicized, with administrations organized on the Carthaginian model and centered in Libyphoenician cities such as Volubilis in Mauretania and Cirta in Numidia.¹⁹

So long as Carthage dominated the western Mediterranean basin, Numidia and Mauretania remained dependent allied kingdoms. That situation changed, however, in the third century BCE. Three devastating wars with Rome spread over more than a century, from 264 BCE to 146 BCE, and ended with the total destruction of Carthage and the liberation of the two North African kingdoms. Under the rule of Massinissa, Numidia became a Roman ally and an important Mediterranean power. Like other Hellenistic kings, Massinissa became a patron of culture, inviting Greek artists and intellectuals to his capital at Cirta, which he adorned with Greek-style buildings, and educating his sons in Greece. Hellenization continued under his son and successor Micipsa, who was reputed to be a student of Greek philosophy. Massinissa and his successors were buried in monumental tombs that combined Phoenician and Greek architectural forms, vivid evidence of the cultural forces in play in North Africa in the late first millennium BCE (see Fig. 23.2).

19 Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress, *The Berbers* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), pp. 10–49.



Figure 23.2 A Numidian Royal Tomb: The Medraquen (Numidia). Possibly the tomb of King Massinissa, c. mid-second century BCE (imageBROKER / Alamy)

Outside the elite circles of the royal court, however, Numidia remained true to its Punic and Libyan roots. Punic remained the language of government and religion even at the royal capital of Cirta, while a script was developed to write Libyan that was widely used in the rural hinterland of the kingdom and still survives in the form of the Tefinagh script used by the Tuaregs. Although comparable evidence is lacking, the indications are that developments in the kingdom of Mauretania after the collapse of Carthage were similar.

Numidia and Mauretania prospered as Roman allies, but their kings ruled as Roman clients, and maintaining the balance between their desire for independence and the demands of their Roman masters proved increasingly difficult. The experience of Numidia was typical. On the death of Micipsa in 118 CE, the kingdom was divided between the king's two sons and a nephew named Jugurtha. Civil war, the extermination of the legitimate royal line, a devastating war with Rome, and ultimately annexation by Rome in 46 BCE followed. The same pattern was repeated elsewhere in North Africa, with Cyrene and the other Greek cities of Libya being annexed in the 70s BCE and the kingdom of Mauretania in 40 CE. Even Egypt, which had enjoyed 300 years of independence under the Macedonian dynasty of the Ptolemies, was occupied by Rome in 30 BCE following the suicide of its last ruler,

Cleopatra VII. However the details differed, the result was the same everywhere in the region: the imposition of direct Roman rule so that, by the mid-first century CE, all of North Africa, from the Sinai Peninsula to the Atlantic Ocean, formed the southern periphery of a vast Mediterranean empire whose center was the city of Rome.

North Africa under the Romans: first century BCE to the third century CE

Although it was not until c. 40 CE that the Romans annexed the kingdom of Mauretania and imposed direct rule throughout North Africa, the character of Roman policy in the region was determined by events half a century earlier in the 20s BCE.²⁰ During the decade following the conquest of Egypt in 30 BCE, the Romans made a concerted attempt to extend their rule south into the desert on a broad front. Campaigns were mounted against the kingdom of Saba in Yemen, Kush, and the kingdom of the Garamantes in the Fezzan. Victories were claimed and even a triumph celebrated over the Garamantes, but the final result was failure on all fronts. Defeated by the logistical problems of campaigning in the desert, the Romans pulled back to the southern border of Egypt and the pre-desert in North Africa, never to attempt to extend their power south into the Sahara and Nubia again.

Securing control of North Africa was not easy. The first century of Roman rule in the region was marked by rebellions that were made harder to suppress by the rebels' ability to use the desert beyond the frontier as a sanctuary from which to launch raids into Roman territory and to draw on the desert tribes to bolster their forces. The most serious such movement was that of the former Roman auxiliary trooper Tacfarinas in Numidia, who frustrated all attempts to defeat him during a seven-year period from 17 CE to 24 CE. A similar uprising in the 40s CE followed the annexation of the kingdom of Mauretania, and as late as 70 CE the Garamantes raided as far as the Mediterranean coast from their home in the Fezzan. By the early second century CE, however, resistance had largely ceased, and a single legion of 5,000 men supported by an unknown number of locally recruited auxiliary

20 For the period under discussion in this section, see Paul MacKendrick, *The North African Stones Speak* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Susan Raven, *Rome in Africa*, 3rd edn. (London: Routledge, 1993); Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers*, pp. 50–80; David Cherry, *Frontier and Society in Roman North Africa* (Oxford University Press, 1998); Elizabeth Fentress, "Romanizing the Berbers," *Past & Present* 190 (2006): 3–33; and David J. Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 43–72, 146–66.



Figure 23.3 The Theatre (Leptis Magna, Libya / © Julian Chichester / Bridgeman Images)

troops sufficed to maintain security throughout the vast area from the western border of Egypt to the Atlantic.

The integration of North Africa into the Roman Empire coincided with a massive increase in demand for the products of the region to meet the needs of Rome with its huge population, perhaps a million strong, and the western Mediterranean provinces. Included among those products were building stone, semi-precious stones, and wild animals for the increasingly popular games, but the greatest demand was for agricultural goods: olive oil, wine, and especially grain for which North Africa became one of Rome's two principal sources of supply (the other was Egypt). To meet the increasing demand, the area under cultivation and the irrigation systems needed to support it expanded into the interior toward the pre-desert. The resulting prosperity is reflected archaeologically in the remains of numerous estates in the interior and of cities near the Mediterranean such as Leptis Magna and Sabratha in Libya, Timgad in Algeria, and Volubilis in Morocco with their spectacular public buildings and monuments (see Fig. 23.3).

The prosperity of Roman North Africa was real but unevenly distributed. The principal beneficiaries were the inhabitants of Carthage and other Roman colonies founded in the late first century BCE and the first century

CE and the upper classes of the pre-Roman cities and towns of the region. The former were mainly Italian in origin, predominantly Roman veterans, while their Punic and Libyan names suggest that the latter were drawn from Romanized members of the tribal elites of the region, descendants of the Libyphoenician upper class that ruled these cities during the pre-Roman period. A similar naming pattern on inscriptions in the interior indicates that the owners of the new estates were drawn from the same groups. Nor was the influence of this African elite limited to North Africa, as evidenced by the growing number of Roman Senators from the region, one of whom, Septimius Severus, even became emperor, founding a dynasty that ruled Rome for almost half a century from 193 CE until 235 CE.

Sub-Saharan Africa: c. 1200 BCE – c. 600 CE

Since the late nineteenth century, historians have associated the first millennium BCE and the early first millennium CE with a development of fundamental importance for the history of Sub-Saharan Africa: the Bantu Expansion, that is, the spread of the Bantu languages, a subfamily of the Niger-Congo language family, over most of central and southern Africa, an area larger than Europe. Early African historians²¹ viewed the Bantu expansion, however, not merely as a linguistic phenomenon. Technologically, it supposedly marked the introduction into central and southern Africa of a package of important technologies that included mixed agriculture, pottery, and especially iron metallurgy. Culturally, foraging peoples such as the pygmies and the Khoisan were believed to have been replaced over much of this huge region by sedentary agriculturalists.

Dating these developments was difficult, but several lines of evidence seemed to point to the late first millennium BCE – early first millennium CE. So, the limited linguistic divergence of the approximately 600 Bantu languages suggested that the Bantu expansion took place quickly and relatively recently, probably within the last few thousand years, while the identification of the border area of Nigeria and Cameroon as the home of Proto-Bantu suggested that its direction was east toward the Great Lakes and, ultimately, the Indian Ocean, and south along the west and east coasts of Africa. As to its cause, most scholars viewed the expansion as resulting from

21 Malcolm Guthrie, "Some Developments in the Prehistory of the Bantu Languages," *The Journal of African History* 3 (1962): 273–82, and Roland Oliver, "The Problem of the Bantu Expansion," *The Journal of African History* 7 (1966): 361–76.

overpopulation, spurred possibly by the introduction of important new crops from Southeast Asia, including bananas and yams, and facilitated by the superiority conferred by the diffusion of iron technology from either North Africa or the Nile Valley. Both these phenomena again seemed to confirm the late first millennium BCE – early first millennium CE date for the expansion suggested by the linguistic evidence.

This view of the Bantu Expansion lasted until the 1990s, when a combination of factors – more intensive linguistic analysis of the Bantu language family, increased archaeological activity, and a growing number of radiocarbon dates for key sites – resulted in its collapse and replacement by a more nuanced and complex reconstruction.²² So, linguistic analysis suggested that the break-up of Proto-Bantu and, therefore, the expansion may have begun as early as the beginning of the third millennium BCE. In addition, while Proto-Bantu vocabulary indicated that the Proto-Bantu were forest dwellers who cultivated root crops, the terminology for grain crops in Bantu languages spoken in the Great Lakes region and east and southern Africa indicated that such crops were acquired from Cushitic speakers encountered during the expansion. Equally important, radiocarbon dates of ironworking sites indicated that iron was being smelted and worked in the Great Lakes region in the early first millennium BCE and gradually diffused westward in succeeding centuries. Such dates, which were earlier than the first appearance of ironworking in North Africa and the Nile Valley, strongly suggested that ironworking in Sub-Saharan Africa resulted from independent invention in Sub-Saharan Africa and not diffusion from a source in the Nile Valley or the Mediterranean region as had been believed.²³ At the same time these dates were too late for iron metallurgy to have been a cause of the Bantu Expansion, although, of course, iron tools may have been a factor during its later phases. Taken together, these facts suggested that the expansion should be viewed as a gradual process, lasting over many centuries, instead of a large-scale migration of iron-using farmers that occurred in a relatively brief period of time, as had been believed for most of the twentieth century.

22 Jan Vansina, "New Linguistic Evidence and 'the Bantu Expansion,'" *The Journal of African History* 36 (1995): 173–95, and John H. Robertson and Rebecca Bradley, "The African Early Iron Age without Bantu Migrations," *History in Africa* 27 (2000): 287–323.

23 Duncan E. Miller and Nikolaas J. van der Merwe, "Early Metal Working in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review of Recent Research," *The Journal of African History* 35 (1994): 1–36; Augustin F. C. Holl, "Early West African Metallurgies: New Data and Old Orthodoxy," *Journal of World Prehistory* 22 (2009): 415–38; and Étienne Zangato and Augustin F. C. Holl, "On the Iron Front: New Evidence from North-Central Africa," *Journal of African Archaeology* 8 (2010): 7–23.

Equally important, according to this reconstruction, the area of Bantu speech would have grown as much by absorbing foraging and farming peoples as by migration.

As is so often the case, the truth probably lies somewhere between the extremes represented by these two views of the Bantu Expansion. What is clear, however, is that the spread of iron-using sedentary societies based on mixed agriculture transformed life over much of central and southern Africa. Population increased, society became more complex, and trade expanded to meet growing demand for iron and other products. In places located where products from different ecological zones could be exchanged and transported by water, towns with economies based on trade and manufacturing appeared.

As a result, while independent villages remained the norm in central and southern Africa until well into the second millennium CE, larger forms of socio-economic organization appeared in West Africa.²⁴ Evidence of the existence of early complex society in the region was first recognized with the discovery of the Nok culture in modern Nigeria.²⁵ For decades the only evidence for the Nok culture consisted of remarkable terracotta figures discovered by modern tin miners that probably were intended for dedication in shrines. Radiocarbon dates from the settlement site of Samun Dukiya and the industrial site of Taruga, however, revealed that the Nok culture actually extended over a vast area of 75,000 km² and was created by iron-using farmers over a period of 700 years from c. 500 BCE to c. 200 CE (see Fig. 23.4).

The emergence of complex society is clearer, however, further north in southern Mauretania, where extensive remains of stone-built villages associated with the Tichitt Tradition reveal the existence of a proto-urban culture based on mixed agriculture as early as the late second millennium BCE. Although the Tichitt Tradition extended throughout much of the first millennium BCE, the increasing emphases on defensive walls and the selection of defensible sites for villages in its final phases indicate that it came under serious attack, probably from Libyan-speaking raiders based in the Sahara.

By c. 300 BCE the Tichitt Tradition had ended in its home territory. A closely related culture survived in the inland delta of the Niger River in Mali, where it seems to have formed part of the matrix for the emergence of the first true West African cities. The earliest attested example is the early

24 Ray A. Kea, "Expansions and Contractions: World-Historical Change and The Western Sudan World-System (1200/1000 BC–1200/1250 AD)," *Journal of World Systems Research* 10 (2004): 723–826.

25 Graham Connah, *Forgotten Africa: An Introduction to its Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 118–24.

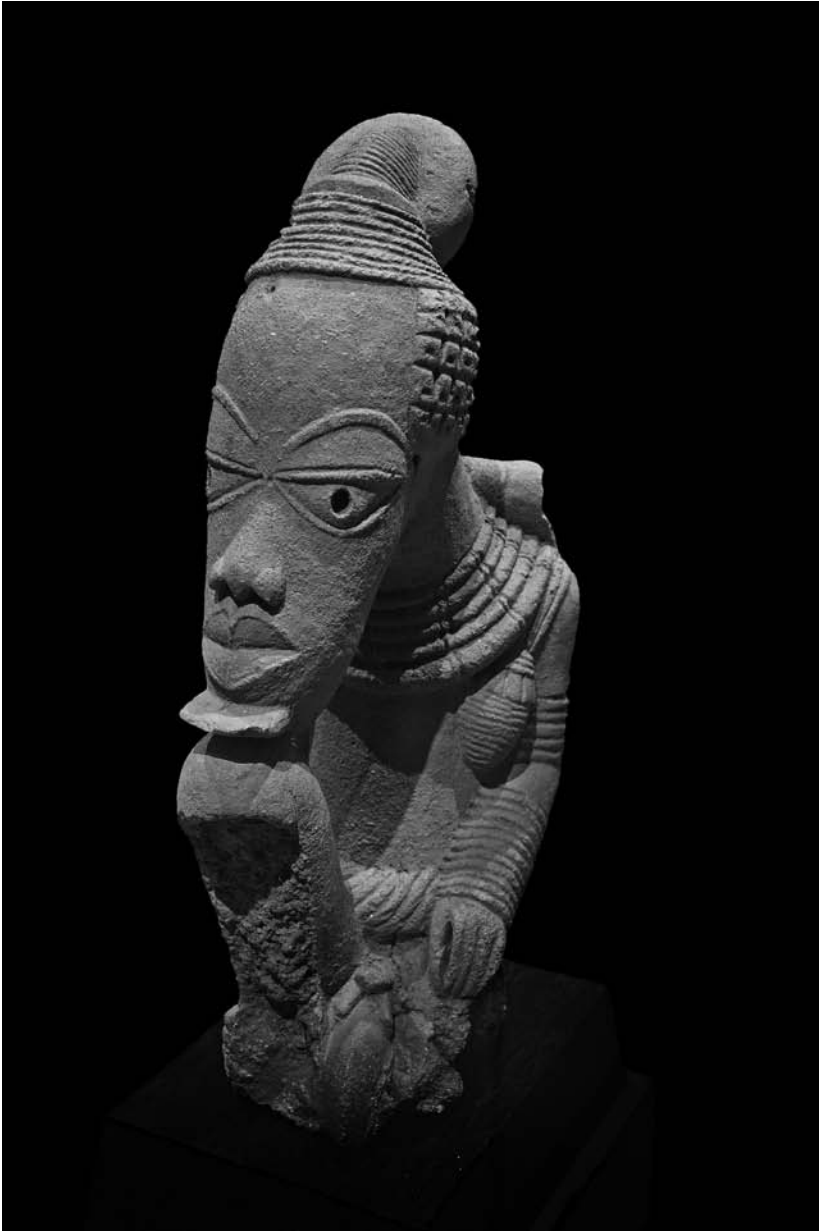


Figure 23.4 Character with chin resting on knee, Nok sculpture, terracotta before sixth century B.C.E., Nigeria (Peter Horree / Alamy)

first-millennium BCE site of Dia, but the process is best documented at the later site of Jenne-Jeno.²⁶ Founded as a village c. 200 BCE in an exceptionally fertile area watered by the Niger River, Jenne grew steadily until by the late first millennium CE it was a walled city approximately 33 hectares in extent surrounded by a cluster of villages, each of which seems to have specialized in a particular craft such as iron working. The secret of Jenne's prosperity was its location, which allowed easy access to the salt and mineral resources of the Sahara to the north and to the animal and plant products and eventually the gold of the forest zone to the south, and made it the center of a regional trade network covering much of the Niger basin and its hinterlands. Unfortunately, archaeology has not yet provided evidence for the social structure and governmental organization of Jenne. The existence of numerous other large mounds in the Inland Delta region, however, indicates that Jenne was only one of several such urban centers in the region. It was control of urban centers such as Jenne and the trade networks dependent on them that would become the foundation of the prosperity of the great empires of the Medieval Sudan such as Ghana and Mali.

Reconnection of Sub-Saharan Africa to Eurasia

Roughly contemporary with the developments just described, the isolation of Sub-Saharan Africa from Eurasia that had begun in the third millennium BCE was gradually overcome. Not surprisingly in view of the difficulty of the trans-Saharan route, the first attempts to make contact with Sub-Saharan Africa were made by sea. In the mid-fifth century BCE, the Carthaginians mounted a large colonizing expedition led by a high magistrate named Hanno south from the old Phoenician colony of Lixus along the Atlantic coast of Africa. What purports to be a Greek translation of Hanno's report survives. Although the text is clearly corrupt and identification of the geographical references in it is controversial, most scholars believe that the expedition reached at least as far south as the Senegal River and possibly as far as Mount Cameroon.²⁷ How many of the colonies Hanno claims to have founded survived is not known, but references by fifth- and fourth-century

26 Roderick J. McIntosh, *Ancient Middle Niger: Urbanism and Self-Organizing Landscape* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

27 Skeptical: Jehan Desanges, *Recherches sur l'Activité des Méditerranéens aux Confins de l'Afrique* (Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, 1978), pp. 39–83. Positive: J. Blomqvist, "Reflections of Carthaginian Commercial Activity in Hanno's *Periplus*," *Orientalia Suecana* 33/35 (1984/86): 53–62; Duane W. Roller, *Through the Pillars of Herakles: Greco-Roman Exploration of the Atlantic* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 22–43.

BCE Greek sources suggest that Carthage's goal was access to gold sources near the Atlantic coast. The trade mentioned by the Greek sources, however, depended on continued support from Carthage, which ceased as a result of the Punic Wars, so that by the mid-first century BCE all Carthaginian activity south of Lixus and the island of Mogador had ceased, and Rome made no attempt to revive it.

While the west coast of Africa faced only the open sea, the east coast opened onto the Indian Ocean with its millennia-old seaborne trading networks. Occasional contact was inevitable, and, indeed, archaeological evidence for the cultivation of bananas, a fruit native to Southeast Asia, in West Africa as early as c. 500 BCE suggests that Austronesian speakers were already visiting the region by that time.²⁸ Full integration of the East African coast into the Indian Ocean network, however, had to wait for the great expansion of trade between the Mediterranean and South Asia that began in the first century BCE. Already by the mid-first century CE, Arab traders were trading manufactured metal goods of all kinds, wine, and grain for ivory, rhinoceros horn, and high-quality tortoise shell. Arab traders were probably also responsible for the other items from the Near East and the Indian Ocean region such as glass beads, cowry shells, and bitumen that have been discovered on archaeological sites as far west as the Senegal basin. The center of this trade was the treaty port of Rhapta, which was governed by Arab merchants under the suzerainty of the kingdom of Himyar in Yemen. Although the site of Rhapta is still unknown, circumstantial evidence suggests that it was located in the Rufiji Delta in Tanzania.²⁹

Integration of East Africa into the Indian Ocean trading network had more dramatic results further north in the Red Sea basin.³⁰ For millennia the Nile Valley had been the primary route by which goods from Northeast Africa reached Egypt and the Mediterranean. The great increase in the number of ships traversing the Red Sea and Indian Ocean offered an alternate and easier

28 Roger Blench, "Bananas and Plantains in Africa: Re-interpreting the Linguistic Evidence," *Ethnobotany & Applications* 7 (2009): 363–80; Roger Blench, "Evidence for the Austronesian Voyages in the Indian Ocean," in Atholl Anderson, James H. Barrett, and Katherine V. Boyle (eds.), *The Global Origins and Development of Seafaring* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 239–48.

29 Felix A. Chami, "The Archaeology of the Rufiji Region Since 1987 to 2000: Coast and Interior Dynamics from AD 00–500," in Felix Chami, Gilbert Pwiti, and Chantal Radimilahy (eds.), *People, Contact and the Environment in the African Past* (Dar-es-Salaam University Press, 1996), pp. 7–20.

30 Jacke Phillips, "Punt and Aksum: Egypt and the Horn of Africa," *The Journal of African History* 38 (1997): 423–57, and Stanley M. Burstein, "Kush, Axum and the Ancient Indian Ocean Trade," *Studia Aegyptiaca* 17 (2002): 127–37.

route for these goods, and geography dictated that it would not be the largely landlocked kingdom of Kush but that of Aksum in the highlands of modern Ethiopia that benefited (see Fig. 23.5).

Unlike Kush, Aksum was of relatively recent origin.³¹ Although archaeological evidence suggests that its roots lie in the early first millennium BCE, when South Arabian colonists founded a series of small kingdoms in the territory of modern Eritrea and Tigray in Ethiopia, the kingdom of Aksum began its rise to prominence in the late first century BCE, when the ruler of one of these kingdoms, that of the Habasha (= Abyssinians), made the city of Aksum his capital. Located on the Ethiopian plateau with ready access to the upper Nile Valley and its hinterlands on the west and to the Red Sea on the east, Aksum was ideally situated to profit from the new conditions in the Red Sea created by the expansion of the Indian Ocean trade. The kings of Aksum took advantage of this opportunity, establishing, in agreement with Rome, Adulis (= Massawa) as a treaty port and encouraging the development of a trade diaspora in their kingdom.

As a result of these developments, Adulis³² became by the mid-first century CE the principal center not only for the export of goods from the coastal regions of the Red Sea and its hinterlands but even for ivory collected in Sennar in Kushite territory. During the second and third century CE, Aksumite kings continued these policies, extending their rule over most of the hinterlands of the southern Red Sea basin and building and maintaining a caravan route to Egypt that bypassed the Nile corridor entirely, thereby confirming Aksum's rule as the principal supplier of Northeast African goods to the Mediterranean basin.

It took time for the effects of these developments on Kush to become evident. Indeed, the late first century BCE and the early first century CE was in many ways the climax of Kushite history. Peaceful relations between Rome and Kush resulted in unprecedented prosperity. By the end of the second century and early third CE, however, conditions had changed dramatically. The emergence of Aksum as Rome's primary source of African goods gradually reduced diplomatic contact between Kush and Roman Egypt, as Roman policy toward the Upper Nile Valley increasingly focused on the defense of the southern frontier of Egypt. The resulting impoverishment of the Kushite monarchy weakened its control over its peripheral territories,

31 The standard history of Aksum is Stuart Munro-Hay, *Aksum: An African Civilization of Late Antiquity* (Edinburgh University Press, 1991).

32 Stuart Munro-Hay, "The Foreign Trade of the Aksumite Port of Adulis," *Azania* 17 (1982): 107–25.



Figure 23.5 Ethiopia, Aksum, great stele and obelisk, c. third–fourth century CE (De Agostini Picture Library / W. Buss / Bridgeman Images)

exposing the kingdom to attack and ultimately conquest by neighboring peoples and states, especially Aksum. As usual, the sources to trace the process in detail are lacking. When the evidence allows us to observe conditions in the region in late antiquity, however, the kingdom of Kush had disappeared, giving way to a series of warring successor states. The Nile corridor had ceased to be the principal artery for the transmission of African goods to Egypt, and Aksum had become Rome's principal ally in Africa and the main intermediary between India and the Mediterranean basin in the Indian Ocean trade.

In contrast to the situation in East Africa, the date of the opening of trans-Saharan connections is controversial. The problem is twofold. Regular trans-Saharan trade is first attested in Medieval Arabic sources, and the contents of the trade – Sub-Saharan gold and slaves exchanged for Saharan salt and copper – leave no archaeological traces, with the result that scholars have tended to date the beginning of trans-Saharan trade to the eighth century CE at the earliest. Circumstantial evidence – rock engravings of horses and chariots aligned north and south in the western Sahara,³³ the presence of one-humped camels in North Africa by the first century BCE,³⁴ and the unexpected minting of gold coins by the mint at Carthage in the fourth century CE³⁵ – suggest, however, that, in fact, trans-Saharan trade began during the early centuries CE. (For a picture of these rock engravings, see Chapter 24 by Ralph Austen on trans-Saharan trade in this volume.) These hints have been strengthened by spectacular discoveries made during the past two decades by Italian and British archaeologists in the territory of the kingdom of the Garamantes in the Fezzan (see Fig. 23.6).

References to the Garamantes are numerous in Greek and Roman texts from the fifth century BCE to late antiquity. These suggest that as early as the fifth century BCE the Garamantes may already have developed a state and were raiding Sub-Saharan African populations, and that by the first century CE their kings' authority extended deep into the Sahara, perhaps as far as Tibetsi or even Lake Chad. Moreover, excavations³⁶ at the Garamantian heartland of

33 Discovered by Henri Lhote, *The Search for the Tassili Frescoes: The Story of the Prehistoric Rock-Paintings of the Sahara*, trans. A. H. Brodrick (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1959), pp. 122–33.

34 Richard W. Bulliet, *The Camel and the Wheel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 111–40.

35 Timothy F. Garrard, "Myth and Metrology: The Early Trans-Saharan Gold Trade," *The Journal of African History* 23 (1982): 443–61.

36 Mario Liverani, "The Garamantes: A Fresh Approach," *Libyan Studies* 31 (2000): 17–28; Liverani, "Rediscovering the Garamantes: Archaeology and History," *Libyan Studies* 35 (2004): 191–200; David Mattingly, "The Garamantes: the First Libyan State," in David



Figure 23.6 Archaeological site of Garama, Libya, c. first half of the first millennium CE (bildagentur-online.com/th-foto / Alamy)

the Wadi al-Ajal and their capital of Garama have revealed that during the first three centuries CE the Garamantian kingdom occupied a territory of c. 250,000 km², used the Libyan script, maintained a massive irrigation-based agricultural system, and imported large amounts of luxury goods from Roman North Africa. The size and wealth of the Garamantian kingdom – wealth that certainly exceeded what could be produced by the trade in semi-precious stones mentioned by Roman writers – combined with the location of Garamantian fortifications and watch towers along later caravan routes toward the Niger bend and the Sahel³⁷ strongly suggest that the trans-Saharan trade already existed during the early centuries CE, albeit probably on a smaller scale than the later Medieval trade. Confirmation of this hypothesis finally has been provided by the discovery at the site of Kissi in Burkina Faso of a wide variety of imported goods, including metal products from Roman

J. Mattingly, Sue McLaren, Elizabeth Savage, Yahya al-Fasatwi, and Khaled Gadgood (eds.), *The Libyan Desert: Natural Resources and Cultural Heritage* (London: The Society for Libyan Studies, 2006), pp. 189–204.

37 Mario Liverani, “Looking for the Southern Frontier of the Garamantes,” *Sahara* 12 (2000): 31–44.

North Africa, cowry shells from the Red Sea or Indian Ocean, and glass from the Near East.³⁸

The birth of Afro-Eurasia: c. 400 CE – c. 900 CE

By the fourth century CE, the framework for the full reintegration of Sub-Saharan Africa into Eurasia as a whole was in place. How that reintegration took place, however, was determined by the resolution of the crisis of late antiquity, a crisis that had both cultural and political dimensions.

Throughout the region, millennia-old traditions of worship and funerary practice gradually disappeared as Christianity, now transformed from an underground cult to the official religion of the Roman Empire, spread. By the mid-sixth century CE, Christianity was dominant from Aksum to the Atlantic. The spread of Christianity, however, did not bring unity but the reverse as old tensions between city and rural populations were overlaid by conflicts over correct doctrine and practice. So in Egypt, Monophysites, who drew their support primarily from the native Coptic population, were in conflict with the predominantly Orthodox Greek population of Alexandria, while further west in North Africa similar struggles were played out between urban-based, Latin-speaking Catholic Christians and Donatists, whose strength was in the largely Libyan countryside.

While religious tensions were felt from Egypt to the Atlantic, their effects were most severe in North Africa, where they hindered the development of a unified defense against the political upheavals that struck the region. As a result, during the two centuries between the end of the dynasty of the Severi in 235 CE and the Vandal invasion in 429 CE, the links that bound the region to the Roman Empire gradually dissolved as the imperial government focused its efforts on defending itself against attacks from the Germans and Sassanid Persia. Mauri nomads took advantage of Roman weakness, raiding deep into Roman territory and crippling agriculture and towns in the frontier zones. As

38 Peter Robertshaw, Sonja Magnavita, Marilee Wood, Erik Melchior, Rachel S. Popelka-Filcoff, and Michael D. Glascock, "Glass Beads from Kissi (Burkina Faso): Chemical Analysis and Archaeological Interpretations," in Sonja Magnavita, Lassina Koté, Peter Breunig, and Oumarou A. Idé (eds.), *Crossroads/ Carrefour Sahel: Cultural and Technological Developments in First Millennium BC/AD West Africa* (Frankfurt am Main: Africa Magna Verlag, 2009), pp. 105–18; and Thomas R. Fenn, John Chesley, David J. Killick, Sonja Magnavita, and Joaquin Ruiz, "Contact Between West Africa and Roman North Africa: Archaeometallurgical Results from Kissi, Northeastern Burkina Faso," in Magnavita et al. (eds.), *Crossroads*, pp. 119–46.

a result, with the Vandal capture of Carthage in 439 CE, a decade after their invasion in 429 CE, Roman rule in North Africa ended, leaving the region divided between the Vandal kingdom in Numidia and several small kingdoms dominated by partially Romanized Libyans in Mauretania.

Instead of bringing security, however, the establishment of the Vandal kingdom opened a period of instability in North Africa that lasted for over two centuries. The Vandal kingdom itself was the first victim, falling to a Roman invasion launched by the Emperor Justinian I in 533 CE. Ravaged by plague and exhausted by conflicts with Slavic and Avar invaders in the Balkans and repeated wars with Sassanid Persia in the Near East, however, Rome proved no more able than the Vandals to contain the raids of the Mauri nomads and to restore security and prosperity to North Africa.

More seriously, the empire also was unable to meet the unexpected challenge of the Arab invasions. During the decade between 632 CE and 642 CE, Arab armies, inspired by the new religion of Islam, overran Sassanid Persia, Syria-Palestine, and Egypt. North Africa, however, proved harder to conquer. Although a major defeat was inflicted on Byzantine forces near Carthage in 647 CE, it took another half-century before the remaining Byzantines and their Libyan allies, whom the Arabs called “Barbar” or “Barbarians,” that is, “Berbers,” were finally overcome in 698 CE by the Arabs and their own Berber client troops. A little over a decade later, they crossed into Spain and overthrew the kingdom of the Visigoths. By the time the Arab and Berber advance was stopped in 732 CE at the Battle of Poitiers, the governor of Ifriqiya – Africa – ruled from his capital at Qayrawan just south of Carthage all of North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, the largest North African political unit since the formation of the Carthaginian Empire a millennium earlier. This hard-won political unity lasted, however, less than half a century. A great Berber revolt in the mid-eighth century CE provoked by the enslavement of Berbers, despite their conversion to Islam, shattered it, and unity was not restored until the rise of the Fatimid dynasty in the tenth century CE. The political fragmentation of North Africa was paralleled by growing cultural unification as Berbers increasingly adopted the new Arabic-based religion of Islam, while Latin-based Christianity gradually declined until it disappeared sometime in the twelfth century CE.

The impact of the Arab expansion further south in Africa, however, was uneven, but everywhere one thing was evident: the desire for slaves needed for labor and particularly for soldiers to supplement the limited number of available Arab troops. So, already in the seventh century, slaves were being exported from the east African coast – what in antiquity was called Azania

and in the Middle Ages Zanj – to Mesopotamia.³⁹ Further north the political order that had prevailed in late antiquity changed dramatically.

Isolated from its Roman ally, the kingdom of Aksum, which at the peak of its power in the early sixth century CE controlled an empire that extended from Sennar in the west to Yemen in the east, collapsed. Although the kingdom itself survived as a Christian state, it did so by relocating into the interior of Ethiopia, abandoning its old capital of Aksum and establishing a new capital at Jarma at a still unidentified site. At about the same time, however, an Arab attempt to conquer the Christian successor states of Kush was defeated at Dongola in 652 CE, resulting in the negotiation of a unique agreement, the *baqt*, in which the independence of the Nubian Christian kingdom of Makuria was recognized and grain subsidies guaranteed in return for an annual tribute of slaves and the guarantee of privileged treatment for Muslim merchants operating in its territory.⁴⁰ Further west, Arab forces were more successful, conquering the old territory of the Garamantes in the Fezzan and thereby gaining access to the trade routes that led south to Tibetsi and Lake Chad and west toward the inland delta of the Niger.

In West Africa, however, the results were dramatically different. Arab sources record a raid that reached the Sahel and brought back to North Africa large amounts of gold and slaves in 733/4 CE, but the sources then are silent for two centuries. When they resume in the tenth century CE, they reveal a complex situation in the Sahel. References to Muslim kingdoms trading slaves attest to the spread of Islam south of the Sahara, but they were the result of conversion of rulers and not conquest. Most remarkable, however, is the dominant position in the region of an empire that Arab geographers called Ghana after the title of its king and its inhabitants Wagadu.⁴¹

The date of the origin of Ghana is unknown, although Arabic references to it as a powerful kingdom c. 800 CE suggest a date earlier in the first millennium CE. More important, by the tenth century CE Ghana ruled a core territory located between the Niger and Senegal rivers, while its authority extended beyond its core to cover numerous vassal states. Ghana's wealth came from its control of the Sub-Saharan end of the caravan trade that brought slaves and gold from the mines at Bambuk and Buré in Mali and

39 The first revolt of African slaves in southern Mesopotamia took place in 689 CE; Alexandre Popovic, *The Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq in the 3rd/9th Century*, trans. L. King (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999), p. 22.

40 On the *baqt* see Derek A. Welsby, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia: Pagans, Christians and Muslims along the Middle Nile* (London: British Museum Press, 2002), pp. 68–72.

41 Fundamental is Nehemia Levtzion, *Ancient Ghana and Mali* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1973).

Guinea to North Africa in exchange for Saharan salt and copper. According to the Arab geographers, Ghana were a sacral monarchy. The relations of the kings of Ghana and their subjects was hedged around with elaborate ceremonial, and after death they were buried together with members of their court in lavishly furnished tombs. The empire also possessed massive military forces consisting of infantry, archers, and cavalry.

Most striking, however, is the nature of Ghana's relations with North African Muslims. According to the Arab sources, Kumbi, the capital of Ghana, was a double city, one section of which was inhabited by Muslim merchants and scholars, while the other was the fortified residence of the pagan king. This situation can only mean that Muslims resided and traded in the territory of Ghana on terms granted them by the kings of Ghana. Unfortunately, whether or not the agreement resulted from a failure to conquer Ghana, as did the similar situation created by the *baqt* in the Upper Nile Valley, is unknown.

More important than the details of the origin of the agreement, however, are its implications. Unlike the situation in Egypt and North Africa, Islam in the Sahel did not spread by conquest but by the conversion of rulers, which forced Muslim clerics and their converts to accommodate the religions of their non-Muslim subjects. The result was the development of a form of Islam marked by the survival of pre-Islamic religious and social practices that puzzled and sometimes shocked visitors from the greater Islamic world, such as the fourteenth-century CE traveler Ibn Battuta.

Conclusion

The two millennia between 1200 BCE and 900 CE were marked by fundamental changes in all aspects of African life. At the beginning of the period, the Sahara divided North Africa from Sub-Saharan Africa, cities and large states were unknown outside the Nile Valley, and the use of metals was limited. By c. 900 CE trade across the Sahara had become common, urban-based states were the norm north of the Sahara and spreading south of the desert, while the use of iron was routine throughout most of the continent. The continent's cultural orientation, however, had changed fundamentally. Thanks to the spread of Islam, much of Africa including North Africa, the Sahel, and the coast of East Africa had become an integral part of a civilization that extended from Afghanistan in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the west.

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Regional study: trans-Saharan trade

RALPH AUSTEN

The last few centuries of the era covered by this volume mark the entry of tropical Africa into the mainstream of world history. Africa had played a major role in human prehistory as the site of the earliest *Homo sapiens*, but the great urban civilizations that later arose in Asia and Europe had contact – and even that very late – only with the northern and eastern coasts of the continent. From the perspective of the Mediterranean world, two great transport barriers awaited the introduction of new technologies before they could be overcome. One of these, the southern Atlantic Ocean, remained at the outer edge of global commercial circuits until Europeans learned how to navigate it during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The other, the Sahara Desert, became a major highway of trade along with political and cultural transformation by the eighth or ninth century CE through the introduction of Islamic camel caravans.

To understand how such a change came about and what its consequences would be, it is necessary to go back at least to 1200 BCE and consider both the degree to which the Maghrib – that portion of northern Africa to the west (Arabic *gharb*) of Egypt – had been integrated into the Mediterranean world and yet remained separated from the *Bilad es-Sudan* (Arabic: Land of the blacks) to the south. The prime factor here is the geography of the Sahara and the adaptation of local populations to its changing conditions.

Geography and prehistory of the Sahara

The Sahara is the world's largest desert (its name in Arabic means "desert"), covering some 3.5 million square miles of sand (only 25 percent) along with gravel, rocky plains, and plateaus. It stretches from the Nile Valley in the east to

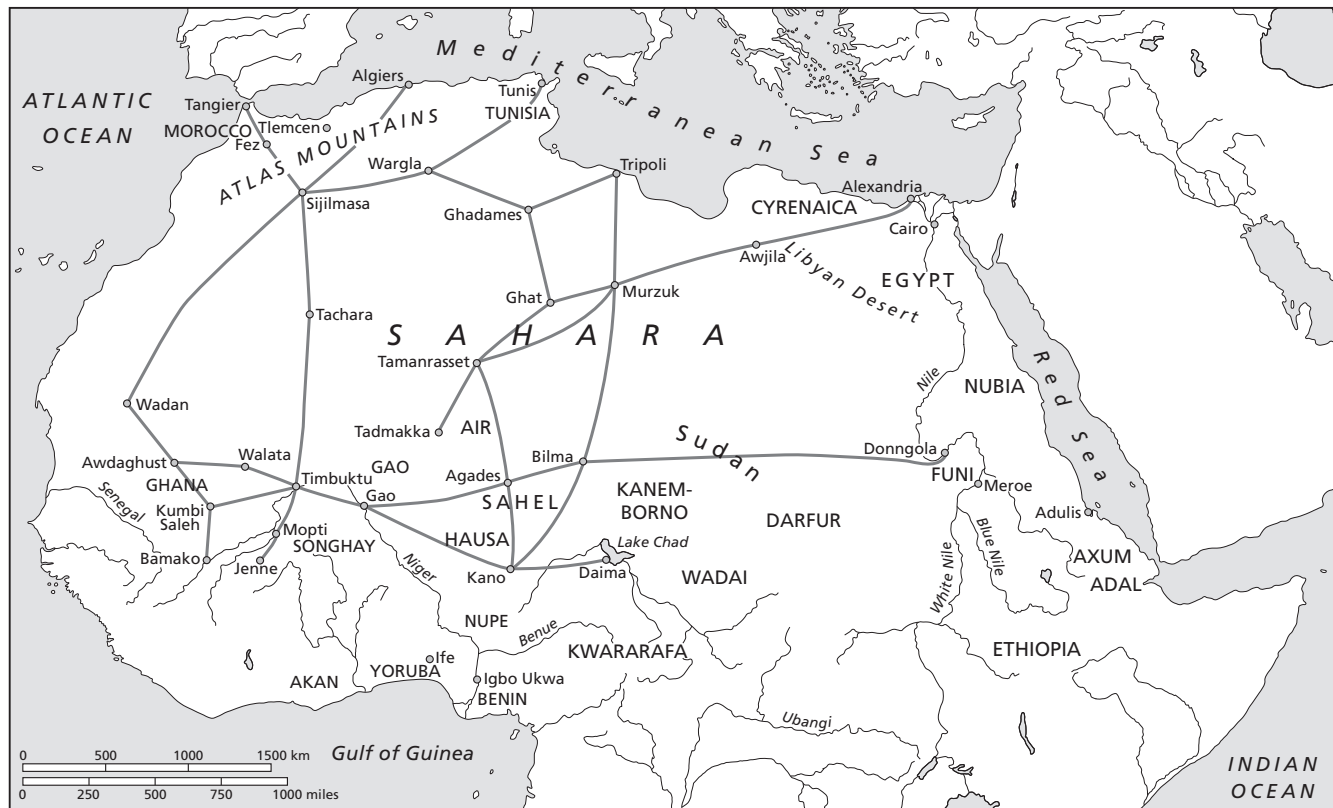
A number of colleagues more specialized in this area than myself have very generously shared their work with me, and I especially want to express my thanks to Walter Kaegi and Andrew Wilson.

the Atlantic Ocean in the west, and its arid landscape is only occasionally interrupted by oases with permanent water and palm trees or more temporary vegetation on mountains and other outcroppings. Across the Sahara's northern *sahel* (Arabic: shore) lie lands with a climate, soil characteristics, and rainfall patterns which allow for the same kind of agriculture (classically centered around wheat fields and olive groves) as the rest of the Mediterranean region.

The lands of the Central and Western Sudan (as distinguished from the Eastern/Nilotic Sudan) to the south of the Sahara are savannahs (grassfields). Rainfall here is less plentiful and reliable than in the Mediterranean but more heavily concentrated, a condition that, in combination with high temperatures, tends to leach nutrients from the ground, leaving only thin top soils. Mediterranean crops cannot, therefore, be cultivated in the Sudan, and local agriculture is based upon indigenous grains such as millet and sorghum or, in zones with optimal irrigation, rice. Even when transport barriers were overcome, these foods were neither abundant nor (in the case of millet and sorghum) valuable enough to be exported like North African wheat and olives. (See Map 24.1.)

The conditions just described pertain to the Sahara and its surrounding lands in historical times, but it is important – especially for their human geography – to remember that they did not always prevail. From about 9000 to 3000 BCE, this region of Africa experienced a Holocene, or wet phase, with abundant rainfall and large lakes. The latter part of this era coincides with the Neolithic or late Stone Age in global human development, when communities began to move from hunting and gathering to settlement in fixed locations with greater control over food resources. Saharan populations during this period were larger than in more recent times and engaged in fishing, animal herding, and possibly some agriculture. From 3000 onward the Sahara became dry again, reaching its present form around 300 CE. In the course of this climate change, many inhabitants of the Sahara moved south into the Sudanic savannahs, and the smaller number who remained in the desert or at its edge (with the exception of oasis-dwellers) became entirely dependent upon herding.

As indicated by the Arabic term *sudan* (plural of *aswad*, black), the peoples living south of the Sahara in historical times are mainly dark-skinned with hair texture and facial features as well as languages (Niger-Congo) that distinguish them from Mediterranean populations. We do not have any information on the languages of Neolithic Saharan communities, but evidence from skeletal remains and rock-paintings suggests that they were of mixed race. To this day some black peoples continue to inhabit the Sahara, but the



Map 24.1 Trans-Saharan trade routes

majority of the population here and in the rest of North Africa are lighter-skinned with Mediterranean body-types and speak (or once spoke) dialects of a Berber¹ language (or language family) that belongs to the same eastern Semitic Afro-Asiatic grouping as Arabic, Hebrew, and ancient Egyptian. It is not clear from where and when the Berbers first entered the Maghrib (probably Egypt around 3000 BCE), but by 1200 BCE they had replaced whatever early Stone Age peoples previously occupied the region and also began to dominate the Sahara.²

Foreign colonization of ancient North Africa

Urbanization and centralized state-building came late to this entire portion of Africa, in comparison with neighboring Mediterranean regions. In fact, the earliest known cities in the Maghrib were foreign colonies, beginning with Carthage (near contemporary Tunis), founded around 814 BCE by Phoenicians from present-day Lebanon. In the seventh century BCE, the Greek commercial rivals of the Phoenicians created their own settlements at Cyrenaica in eastern Libya. During the second century BCE, the Romans took control over all of North Africa, establishing trading and agricultural centers which survived into the fifth century CE from Egypt all the way to Morocco. The Phoenicians had a great cultural impact upon North Africa, but few records of their economic activities or social order survived Roman destruction of the much-hated Carthage (under Hannibal its armies had threatened the Italian mainland between 218–203 BCE). Even for the Romans themselves, the documentation on African matters other than politics and warfare is sparse.

The major attraction of Africa for these foreign ventures lay in the fertile regions near the coast, which produced significant quantities of wheat, olive oil, and wine for export. The urban population of Roman Africa may have amounted to as much as 5 million people consisting of both Italian immigrants and acculturated Berbers, although existing evidence does not allow us to measure their origins with any precision. In the immediate rural hinterlands, the majority of the population appears to have remained Berber although their languages (at least as expressed in inscriptions) included

1 The term “Berber” derives from “barbarian” and is thus used reluctantly. However, the more acceptable alternative, “Amazigh,” has not replaced it, even in works discussing the identity politics of this group, e.g. Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *The Berber Identity Movement and the Challenge to North African States* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

2 Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress, *The Berbers: The People of Africa* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 10–15.

Latin, Punic (a Western Mediterranean form of Phoenician), and various versions of Berber.³

The example or perhaps just the stimulus of foreign colonization inspired Berber groups to form their own states in the coastal regions of North Africa. The large “Numidian Kingdoms,” extending westward from present-day Tunisia, played a major role in the third- and second-century BCE Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage. After the fall of Carthage, however, a combination of internal instability and Roman imperial ambition ended the independence of the Berber polities and drew the Romans further along the North African coast and southwards towards the Sahara. The Romans restricted their formal rule in Africa to the areas north of the *limes* (a system of fortifications, roads, and other defensive structures) well outside the desert and did not base troops any farther south than this. However, during the first centuries CE scouting expeditions, occasional raids, and even some commercial agents regularly crossed into the northern part of the Sahara.⁴

Ancient Saharan and Sudanic urbanism

If the combination of indigenous and colonial North African ventures had already linked the Mediterranean and Saharan worlds by the early Christian centuries, to what degree were the contemporaneous societies of the Sudan and within the desert itself also prepared to enter global circuits of exchange? Posed in these terms, the answer must be that they were somewhat prepared to do so: both of these southern regions took major steps toward urbanization and expanded markets, but it is doubtful that these developments led to the initiation of a regular or at least large-scale and direct trans-Saharan trade. One of the problems here is that the most dynamic centers of economic and political change in the Sudan and Sahara emerged at a great distance from one another.

The major sites of Sudanic development before the Islamic era are located in the western portion of the region, from Dar Tichett in Mauretania through Gao on the Niger River Bend but especially Jenne in the Inner Niger Delta

3 David Cherry, *Frontier and Society in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 75–100, and Paul Corbier and Marc Griesheimer, *L'Afrique romaine: 146 av. J.-C. : 439 ap. J.-C.* (Paris: Ellipses, 2005), pp. 93–104. The sources cited here are inscriptions and some sparse descriptions by Roman geographers and historians.

4 René Rebuffat, “Au-delà des camps romains de l'Afrique Mineure: Renseignement, contrôle, pénétration,” in Hildegard Temporini (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, 11 (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1982), pp. 474–513.

(with a population of between 10,000 and 26,000).⁵ The development of such dense (and in the cases of Jenne and Gao clearly urban) settlements between the late first millennium BCE and early first millennium CE were all connected in some degree to the Sahara, first involving pastoral migrations southward due to desiccation of the desert and then also comprising exchanges for such Saharan goods as copper and salt.

None of the Western Sudanic centers of this era were organized as hierarchical and expansive states, a phenomenon that did occur within the Sahara itself but somewhat to the east in the Libyan region of Fazzan, where the Garamantian civilization arose about 1000 BCE and survived to c. 700 CE (with a high point between the first and third centuries CE).⁶ The Garamantes engaged in both warfare and commerce with Carthage and Roman North Africa, but the literary sources refer almost entirely to the former and give no indication of the desert kingdom's culture or economy. From archaeological evidence we can appreciate both the rich urban architecture and (unfortunately undecipherable) Libyan writing system of the Garamantes but above all their sophisticated *foggara* irrigation system that supported a population of between 50,000 and 100,000 in an area covering some 250,000 square kilometers. (For a photograph of Garamantes buildings, see Fig. 23.6 in Chapter 23 by Stanley Burstein, this volume.)

The one relatively extended and complimentary contemporary description of the Garamantes, by the Greek historian Herodotus (c. 484–425 BCE), presents them as possible precursors of later trans-Saharan commerce; they used chariots to “chase the Troglodyte Ethiopians”⁷ and stood at the center of a series of geographical sites extending westward across the Sahara that might be interpreted as a desert caravan route linking Egypt with the Niger Bend.⁸

5 Susan Keech McIntosh, “Changing Perceptions of West Africa’s Past: Archaeological Research Since 1988,” *Journal of Archaeological Research* 2 (1994): 165–98; Timothy Insoll, “Iron Age Gao: An Archaeological Contribution,” *Journal of African History* 38 (1997): 1–30; and Augustin Holl, “Coping with Uncertainty: Neolithic Life in the Dhar Tichitt-Walata, Mauritania (ca. 4000–2300 BP),” *Comptes Rendus Geoscience* 341 (2009): 703–12.

6 The Garamantes have been subject to considerable recent and still ongoing archaeological research under the leadership of David Mattingly. For summaries of this work in relation to the present essay, see David Mattingly, “The Garamantes of Fazzan: An Early Libyan State with Trans-Saharan Connections,” in Amelia Dowler and Elizabeth R. Galvin (eds.), *Money, Trade and Trade Routes in Pre-Islamic North Africa* (London: The British Museum, 2011), pp. 49–60; and Andrew Wilson, “Saharan Trade in the Roman Period: Short-, Medium- and Long-Distance Trade Networks,” *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa* 47 (2012): 409–49.

7 Ancient Greek “Ethiopian” (burnt face), like Arabic “Sudani,” simply referred to black people as opposed to any specific African community.

8 Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. A. D. Godley (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), vol. II, pp. 383–89.

This reading of Herodotus stands on one side of a long-standing historical debate about pre-Islamic Saharan trade.⁹ Given the limited evidence for such traffic, the easiest conclusion is that it did not exist, but recent scholarship has been pushing in a more affirmative direction, revealing, at the very least, the conditions necessary for such a system of cross-desert exchange and the documentation that may reveal when it first came into place.

Ancient (trans-?) Saharan trade

The main conditions for conveying commodities through a vast and difficult expanse like the Sahara are two: first, the presence of goods with sufficient value to warrant the expense and risk of preindustrial carriage across an environment of this kind; second, the availability of a transport system that could make the cost of such goods competitive with alternative sources. For Islamic times we have numerous descriptions of trans-Saharan caravan commerce by direct participants or at least authors who were in contact with them. The absence of such accounts in the ancient era¹⁰ does not prove that these voyages did not occur, but it does force us to turn to less direct evidence, mainly from archaeology.

The kinds of manufactured goods that made their way southward across the Sahara in the Islamic era (especially textiles, ceramics, glassware, and metalware) were, for the most part, available during Carthaginian and Roman/Byzantine times; thus, a key test for a trans-desert trade in this earlier period is the presence of Mediterranean commodities in Saharan and Sudanic sites that can be dated before 700 CE. Such goods are abundant in the Fazzan sites of the Garamantes state; some are also found in the fifth-century CE tomb ascribed to "Tin-Hanan" in the Hoggar mountains, a west central Sahara location that marks the end point of the desert route described by Herodotus and posited as a link to the Western Sudan.¹¹ Excavations in the

9 R. C. C. Law, "The Garamantes and Trans-Saharan Enterprise in Classical Times," *Journal of African History* 8 (1967): 181–200, and Mario Liverani, "The Libyan Caravan Road in Herodotus IV.181–185," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 43 (2000): 496–520.

10 There is an alleged Carthaginian text, *The Periplus of Hanno*, detailing a sea passage from the Mediterranean to some distant point in tropical West Africa, but it is believed by most scholars to be largely a Greek literary construction based on Atlantic trade extending only along the western Moroccan coast: see Raymond Mauny, "La navigation sur les côtes du Sahara pendant l'Antiquité," *Revue des Etudes Anciennes* 57 (1955): 92–101, and Paul E. H. Hair, "The 'Periplus of Hanno' in the History and Historiography of Black Africa," *History in Africa* 14 (1987): 43–66.

11 Brett and Fentress, *Berbers*, pp. 206–208, and Malika Hachid, "Du nouveau sur le monument d'Abalessa (Ahaggar, Algérie)," *Sahara* 17 (2006): 95–119.

Sudan, however, have produced what one leading scholar calls “a total lack of archaeological evidence on the Niger Bend or elsewhere in the Western Sahel attesting to Roman or other pre-Arab Mediterranean presence, albeit fleeting.”¹² On the other hand, much archaeology remains to be done in the Sudan, and recent analysis of copper objects and glass beads found in the rather obscure Kisii region of Burkina Faso at least suggests greater importation of northern goods during this time than was previously known.¹³ A further possibility is that Sudanic goods may have been purchased by Saharan peoples with their own products and then exchanged for Mediterranean commodities that never reached the Sudan. This argument makes sense for the Garamantian civilization, with the rich agricultural and artisanal production of its peak era (c. 70–300 CE), but probably not, at least on the same scale, for other times and places in the Sahara before 700 CE.

The most important items exported by the Sudan in Islamic times were gold and slaves. Most of the historical controversy about earlier trans-Saharan trade centers around gold, whose mediaeval Sudanic sources lay to the south and west of the Niger Bend. This location puts it a great distance from the Garamantes and also, if exports are tied to urban development in the Niger region (somewhat after 200 CE), far later than the trade route implied by the fifth-century BCE account of Herodotus and somewhat after the flourishing era of the Garamantes. Andrew Wilson and Kevin McDonald posit the possibility of gold trade from the Niger Bend via Algeria, on the basis of Roman artifacts at Tin-Hanan and a few other neighboring places as well the juxtaposition of Kisii to the sources of ore.¹⁴

The most serious argument for a Sudanic gold reaching the Mediterranean in ancient times refers to the late Roman and Byzantine eras (c. 100–680 CE) when camels were already in use for travel in the northern Sahara and a good

12 Timothy Insoll, “Islamic Archaeology and the Sahara,” in David Mattingly (ed.), *The Libyan Desert: Natural Resources and Cultural Heritage* (London: Society for Libyan Studies, 2006), p. 230.

13 Thomas R. Fenn, David John Killick, John Chelsey, Sonja Magnavita, and Joaquin Ruiz, “Contacts between West Africa and Roman North Africa: Archaeometallurgical Results from Kisii, Northeastern Burkina Faso,” in Sonja Magnavita, Lassina Koté, Peter Breunig, and Oumarou A. Idé (eds.), *Crossroads/Carrefour Sahel: Cultural and Technological Developments in First Millennium BC/AD West Africa* (Frankfurt am Main: Africa Magna Verlag, 2009), pp. 119–46; Kevin C. MacDonald, “A View from the South: Sub-Saharan Evidence for Contacts between North Africa, Mauritania and the Niger, 1000 BC – AD 700,” in Dowler and Galvin, *Money, Trade and Trade Routes*, pp. 72–82, notes that this site lay along a potential gold trade route, but see below.

14 Wilson, “Saharan Trade,” and MacDonald, “A View from the South,” pp. 72–82.

deal of gold was being minted in the region.¹⁵ Closer examination of Byzantine gold sources, the weights and measures used in later Islamic gold trade, and, especially, analyses of trace elements in Byzantine and early Islamic North African coinage do not, however, provide any evidence of a trans-Saharan gold trade before the mid-eighth century CE.¹⁶ We can be pretty sure that such trade was well under way by the mid-ninth century, on the basis of gold coin molds dating to this time excavated at Tadmekka in the southern Sahara, a development that suggests a level of commerce that must have had an earlier history.¹⁷ The only literary documentation for a prior date (or any trans-Saharan gold trade before the tenth century) is the report of an Arab “expedition to Sous [southwestern Morocco] and the country of Sudan” sometime after 734 which “got as much gold as he [the leader] wanted.”¹⁸ However, this narrative was recorded more than a century after the event it describes and is contradicted by subsequent accounts of the same raid.¹⁹

Black African slaves were also found in the ancient Mediterranean world but not – despite a very high general demand for servile labor – in large numbers.²⁰ Moreover, those slaves observed on the North African coast and either remaining there or brought on to other destinations probably did not, for the most part, arrive via trans-Saharan trade. A fourth-century CE Syrian

15 Timothy F. Garrard, “Myth and Metrology: The Early Trans-Saharan Gold Trade,” *Journal of African History* 23 (1982): 443–61.

16 Walter Emil Kaegi, “Byzantium and the Early Trans-Saharan Gold Trade: A Cautionary Note,” *Graeco-Arabica* 3 (1984): 95–100; Jean Devisse, “Or d’Afrique,” *Arabica* 43 (1996): 234–43; A. Gondonneau, C. Roux, Maria Filomena Guerra, and C. Morrisson, “La frappe de l’or à l’époque de l’expansion musulmane et les mines de l’ouest de l’Afrique: L’apport analytique,” in Bernd Kluge and Bernhard Weissner (eds.), *International Congress of Numismatics* (Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2000), pp. 1264–74; and A. Gondonneau and Maria Filomena Guerra, “The Circulation of Precious Metals in the Arab Empire: The Case of the Near and the Middle East,” *Archaeometry* 44 (2002): 573–99.

17 Sam Nixon, Thilo Rehren, and Maria Filomena Guerra, “New Light on the Early Islamic West African Gold Trade: Coin Moulds from Tadmekka, Mali,” *Antiquity* 85 (2011): 1353–68, and Sam Nixon, “Excavating Essouk-Tadmakka (Mali): New Archaeological Investigations of Early Islamic Trans-Saharan Trade,” *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa* 44 (2009): 217–55.

18 Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam, *The History of the Conquest of Egypt, North Africa and Spain, known as the Futūḥ Miṣr*, trans. J. F. P. Hopkins, in J. F. P. Hopkins and Nehemia Levtzion, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 13.

19 For three later Arab accounts of this expedition that do not mention gold, see Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources*, pp. 18, 158, and 326.

20 There is no systematic quantitative data behind this assertion by all scholars in the field, but apart from general descriptions, it is supported by literary evidence indicating that virtually all black Africans known to ancient writers were slaves, yet slavery was not – as in the later Islamic and Atlantic worlds – identified with blacks; see Walter Schiedel, “The Roman Slave Supply,” in Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (eds.), *The Cambridge World History of Slavery* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), vol. 1, pp. 287–310, and Erich S. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 197–220.

merchant's account of "the Whole World and its Peoples" notes that "the country of Mauretania" (roughly western Algeria and Morocco) "carries on trade in clothing and slaves" but then goes on to describe the lands south of "Africa" (coastal Tunisia and Libya) as "a great desert country" with nothing in it but "a perverse race of barbarians who are called Mazices or Ethiopians."²¹ This text can be read in two ways: it indicates either little trans-Saharan slave trade (the slaves from Mauretania, on the basis of both geography and independent literary evidence²², were Berbers and the Libyan desert populations are of no commercial interest) or the opposite (perhaps sub-Saharan slaves did pass through Mauretania and the knowledge of "Ethiopians" in or around the Fazzan suggests that they regularly came from there to the Mediterranean).

Most of the scant documentation we do have for trade in black Africans comes from Egypt, in part because the survival of papyrus in the dry climate there gives us better records than from other parts of the ancient world. However, there are also some inscriptions telling of the Garamantes delivering such captives to sites in Tunisia as well as the frontier post of Golaia (now Bu Njem) in Libya.²³ This information is consistent with both Herodotus' account and a later Roman account of Garamantes chariot raids against "Ethiopians." It seems clear that the extensive imports of Roman goods by the Garamantes had to be paid for with something. Earlier historians assumed this export was "carbuncles," a semi-precious red carnelian stone found in the northern Fazzan and the only commodity from this region given much attention in Mediterranean texts.²⁴ However, these references date to a time prior to the fullest development of the Garamantian civilization, and Wilson makes a good case for the probability that during this time, the Garamantes (whose skeletal remains indicate a significant black African population) would have needed large numbers of slaves to maintain their irrigation system. If such traffic existed, based on the described chariot raids and/or peaceful exchange, the Garamantes could also have sold thousands of such captives to the north each year, a number that

21 *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, trans. Jean Rougé (Paris: Du Cerf, 1966), pp. 200–203; the work also refers to extensive slave trading from Pannonia, a Roman province in south central Europe, pp. 196–97. Mazices may be a latinization of the current Berber name for themselves, "imazighen."

22 Kyle Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275–425* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

23 Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World*, pp. 86–99.

24 Law, "The Garamantes and Trans-Saharan Enterprise," 187–93, and David Mattingly, "The Garamantes: The First Libyan State," in Mattingly (ed.), *Libyan Desert*, p. 200.

would not have made a great demographic impact upon even the servile population of the Roman Empire.²⁵ Based upon the number of Roman artifacts imported into the Fazzan, such trade continued well into the period of Garamantian economic decline after 300 CE, but this diminution may explain its apparent invisibility in the fourth-century Syrian merchant's report.

In his account of the Sahara, Herodotus says nothing about gold and very little on slaves but gives a great deal of attention to salt. The Garamantes and all the people around them reside on "hillocks of salt" and in the western desert "There is a mine of salt on it every ten days' journey" and men dwell in houses "all built of the blocks of salt."²⁶ In later times such block salt was highly valued in the Sudan, where it met an especially acute need for supplements to a low-saline cereal diet in a high-temperature region. The Sudan had other sources of salt via locally produced vegetable ash and sea salt from the Atlantic Ocean, but neither of these provided the concentrated salinity as well as transportability of Saharan blocks.

We have no direct evidence of Saharan salt trade in the pre-Islamic era, and historians of this industry are reluctant to project it back beyond the time of the earliest written records.²⁷ But Herodotus' account implies a prominence and level of production that is usually associated with commercialization, and the development of agriculture in the contemporaneous Sudan adds to the plausibility of such a market system. If these exchanges existed, the Sudanic exports would probably not have been gold or any large number of slaves but rather agricultural goods and dried freshwater fish, for which there was (and is) a demand in the desert. Whether or not, as Wilson argues, such shorter-range commercial networks indirectly connected the Sudan to the Mediterranean in ancient times, they did lay the groundwork for subsequent trans-Saharan trade and would also continue into the Islamic era, "providing the infrastructure for much trans-regional commerce."²⁸

While the pre-Islamic inhabitants of the Sahara produced no usable written records, they did leave a legacy of rock art that provides, among other

25 Wilson, "Saharan Trade." 26 Herodotus, *The Histories*, pp. 387–89.

27 E. Ann McDougall, "Salts of the Western Sahara: Myths, Mysteries, and Historical Significance," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 23 (1990): 231–57. The main site of later Central Saharan salt production was not known to be very active in the pre-Islamic era; see Knut S. Vikør, *The Oasis of Salt: The History of Kavar, a Saharan Centre of Salt Production* (Bergen, Norway: Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 1999); however, Wilson, in "Saharan Trade," notes that very little archaeological work has been done at Kavar, which may have been linked to the Garamantes.

28 Judith Scheele, "Traders, Saints and Irrigation: Reflections on Saharan Connectivity," *Journal of African History* 51 (2011): 282–83.



Figure 24.1 Rock painting of a warrior, probably of the Garamantes tribe, with team of horses, southern Algeria (Robert Estall Photo Agency / Alamy)

information, good indications of the animal transport available during various eras.²⁹ The chronology of this art and the worlds it depicts is not easy to establish, but scholars seem agreed that it falls into three periods: a bovidian, corresponding to the Neolithic era and slightly beyond (c. 4000–1000 BCE) in which cattle are the main domestic animals and used (possibly along with donkeys) for limited transport; a horse era corresponding to Mediterranean colonization of the Maghrib and Berber domination of the Sahara (c. 1000 BCE – 100 CE) and a camel era immediately preceding the beginning of known trans-Saharan trade (beginning c. 100 BCE).

Horses and chariots are not only shown on numerous Saharan frescoes but also described in accounts of the Garamantes by Herodotus as well as later Roman sources (see Fig. 24.1). However, apart from the capture of slaves, this information tells us little about the economic history of the region since chariots are shown, corresponding to their use throughout the Mediterranean, in contexts of warfare, racing, and heroic display rather than commercial transport. The Sahara, as it became increasingly dry, was

29 Alfred Muzzolini, “Livestock in Saharan Rock Art,” in Roger M. Blench and Kevin C. MacDonald (eds.), *The Origins and Development of African Livestock: Archaeology, Genetics, Linguistics, and Ethnography* (London: UCL Press, 2000), pp. 87–110.

not very hospitable to wheeled vehicles or even unharnessed horses, who could not survive long journeys across the desert. Merchant caravans connecting the Maghrib and the Sudan would thus await the arrival and adaptation of the camel.

A form of wild camel is native to North Africa, and there is evidence to suggest that such animals never disappeared from the Sahara.³⁰ However, they do not appear in local rock art or reports of domestic use until shortly before the Christian era. It is quite probable that camels were reintroduced into the region at this time from farther east or, at the very least, their usage for transport was adopted from practices first developed in Arabia and passed through Egypt.³¹ However this chronology is understood, there remains a gap between the presence of domesticated camels, capable of carrying goods over long distances under the limited food and water conditions of the desert, and the clear initiation of direct and sustained trans-Saharan trade. The explanation for this delay is no longer technological but political and cultural.

The disorders of North African late antiquity

Widespread camel usage in North Africa was established by the early centuries CE yet was soon followed (for no related reason) by a decline in Roman rule as well as general social order throughout the region. For much of the third century CE, the entire Roman Empire was in crisis, from which it was rescued only by the harsh reforms of the Emperor Diocletian (284–305), who initiated a reduction of garrisons from the southern frontiers of the Maghrib, particularly in the Moroccan and Libyan zones that would become the main avenues of trans-Saharan trade.³² On the other side of this border, the Garamantian regime also fell into gradual decay from the early 300s, marked by a diminishing supply of water from the *foggara* irrigation system and the fortification of agricultural settlements. These conditions are linked to raiding

30 Brent D. Shaw, "The Camel in Roman North Africa and the Sahara: History, Biology, and Human Economy," *Bulletin de l'Institut fondamental d'Afrique noire* 41 (1979): 663–721.

31 This is the argument of Richard W. Bulliet, *The Camel and the Wheel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975); for reconciliation with Shaw, see Michael Brett, "Libya and the Sahara in African History," in Mattingly (ed.), *Libyan Desert*, p. 273.

32 R. C. C. Law, "North Africa in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods, 323 BC to AD 305," in J. D. Fage and Roland Oliver (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 1978), vol. 11, pp. 205–209, and David Mattingly, *Tripolitana* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1994), pp. 191–93.

by Berber tribes against both coastal cities (recorded in Roman texts) and, apparently, the urban settlements of the Fazzan.³³

The reign of Diocletian was followed by that of Constantine, who sought a new basis of unity in the Roman Empire through the embrace of Christianity as its official religion. The impact of this faith upon North Africa was ambiguous. On the one hand, it produced the globally most significant figure of that region's spiritual and intellectual history, St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE). Yet, along with his inspiring *Confessions* and *The City of God*, Augustine also wrote lengthy polemics against what he called “the Donatists,” a group of dissenting clergy probably representing the majority of local Christians who identified the bishops now recognized by the emperor as heirs of those who had collaborated in Diocletian's earlier persecutions. The “Catholic–Donatist” split divided North African Christians throughout the last period of Roman rule and involved very high levels of violence, including the mobilization of “Circumcellions,” itinerant rural laborers who often sought martyrdom in suicidal attacks against both the established church and wealthy landowners.³⁴

The climax of this weakness in the Roman regime was the invasion of coastal North Africa in 429 CE by the Vandals, a Germanic people who ruled the Maghrib for about a century.³⁵ Despite their official designation as “barbarians” and the English connotation of their name (based on their sack of Rome in 455), the Vandals did not wreak deliberate destruction on their African territorial base. Instead, they developed a *modus vivendi* with the Roman landholding elite and maintained exports from the major coastal cities. Nonetheless, the Vandals represented yet another Christian sect (Arians) and were (like their late Roman predecessors and Byzantine successors) unable to establish any effective control over the North African hinterland.

In 533 CE Roman authority was restored to the Maghrib, although this time under the Byzantine (Eastern) Empire based in Constantinople. The Byzantine authorities, like their Vandal predecessors, “were not well-suited to control inland North African transportation and travel or military

33 Wilson, “Saharan Trade”; Wilson is undecided as to whether the Garamantes' irrigation crisis was due to climate change, flaws in the aquifer base or its overuse by the growing local population.

34 Brent D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

35 Averil Cameron, “Vandal and Byzantine Africa,” in Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins, and Michael Whitby (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), vol. xiv, pp. 553–59, and Andrew H. Merrills (ed.), *Vandals, Romans and Berbers: New Perspectives on Late Antique North Africa* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 3–24.



Figure 24.2 Camels carrying salt into the village of Araouane, Mali. Araouane is the main stopping point for camel caravans working the salt trade between Taodenni and Timbuktu (© George Steinmetz/Corbis)

movements.”³⁶ The two centuries of their rule witnessed the continuation of religious divisions and Berber uprisings, along with general economic decline, dissension in the military ranks and “seemingly insatiable demands for revenue from the central Byzantine imperial authorities.”³⁷ The establishment of sustained and direct links between Mediterranean and Sudanic Africa would thus await yet another external colonization, that of Muslim Arabs in the seventh century C.E.

The Arab conquest

What the new Muslim regime eventually provided for this larger region was a stable political order extending throughout the Maghrib, an established practice of long-distance camel caravan commerce, and a religion that would bind rather than divide the communities on both sides of the Sahara (see Fig. 24.2). These conditions did not come into place until well after the

³⁶ Walter E. Kaegi, *Muslim Expansion and Byzantine Collapse in North Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 41.

³⁷ Kaegi, *Muslim Expansion*, p. 282, and Cameron, “Vandal and Byzantine Africa,” pp. 559–69.

initial Arab invasions of North Africa and even then in a somewhat paradoxical manner.

The Muslim conquest of North Africa was a prolonged, often disorderly affair extending from 643 CE until the first decade of the following century and concentrating, as had earlier colorizations, on the Mediterranean coast. The forces of Islam took control of Egypt in 642 and within the next year had established a foothold in eastern Libya. For the next twenty-eight years, however, their ventures further west consisted mainly of raids designed both to defend Egypt against Byzantine counterattacks and to exact tribute from North African populations. Only with the foundation of the new city of Qayrawan (caravan) in the near interior of Tunisia between 670 and 675 did Arab forces create a base in the heartland of the Maghrib. It took them until 698 to drive the Byzantines definitively from the major coastal cities and a few more years to establish control over northern Morocco and move from there, in 711, into the neighboring European region of Spain.

Among the raids which accompanied or immediately followed this westward march were at least two expeditions into the Sahara. We know very little about the c. 734 move into southern Morocco and (possibly) its gold trade, but a venture of 666–67 into and beyond the Fazzan by the legendary Uqba ibn Nafi has been recorded in some detail. In geographical extent, Uqba's raid did not represent a greater penetration of the desert than several known Roman efforts in conjunction with the Garamantes. The formulaic account, by the ninth-century Egyptian chronicler Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, of Uqba's encounters with a series of Saharan rulers, also reads more like a literary trope than a plausible statement of what actually occurred:

He seized the king and cut off his finger. The king asked him: "Why have you done this to me?" Uqba answered: "As a lesson to you, for when you look at your finger, you won't make war on the Arabs." Then he imposed on him a tribute of 360 slaves.³⁸

Yet however fanciful these procedures and numbers may be, they reflect a new relationship between Mediterranean conquerors and the African hinterland, one that would ultimately produce enduring and wide-ranging trans-Saharan links, but only through the initial creation of even greater disorder in the Maghrib. A major basis for both these conditions was the renewal and

38 Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, *The History of the Conquest of Egypt*, pp. 12–13.

intensification by the Arabs of a Roman policy that had largely been abandoned by the Vandals and Byzantines: the forcible recruitment of large numbers of Berbers as slaves for both local use and export.³⁹

The inland Berbers responded to these impositions as they had to previous invasions, by forming their own large-scale states. As a result of Berber counterattacks, as well as political instability in the Caliphate at home, Uqba's base of Qayrawan was abandoned several times between 670 and 700. Uqba himself died around 683 in a battle against Kusayla, a Berber leader who maintained his own empire in Tunisia and eastern Algeria for several years. In about 688 Kusayla was, in turn, killed by a newly arrived Arab force. But in 790s the invaders again gave way, this time to a Berber queen known mainly by her Arabic sobriquet, "al-Kahina" (the diviner), whose looser regime was only destroyed in 703.⁴⁰

Kusayla and al-Kahina are justifiably remembered in North African historiography as bearers of "the torch of resistance" against alien domination.⁴¹ Nonetheless, as with earlier Berber kingdoms, both drew upon the culture of coastal colonizers for their political practices and hybrid identity. Kusayla was even an ally of the Byzantine regime, still based at his time in Carthage, and al-Kahina, who flourished after Carthage had fallen to the Arabs, nonetheless appears to have been more or less Christian. The future of the North African interior was, however, manifested by the army that defeated Kusayla and consisted of both Arabs and Berbers. From this point on, resistance to the external forces as well as the capacity to reach across the Sahara would draw upon dissident versions of Islam.

Kharajite Muslims and the beginnings of trans-Saharan trade

Once the conquest of North Africa had been completed, Islam gradually became the overwhelmingly dominant religion of the Maghrib. Christianity survived for another 400 years but as an increasingly marginal faith which disappeared almost completely with the persecutions of the twelfth-century

39 Elizabeth Savage, *A Gateway to Hell, a Gateway To Paradise: The North African Response to the Arab Conquest* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1997), pp. 71–78.

40 *Encyclopédie berbère* (Aix-en-Provence: EDISUD, 2008), see "Koceila," "Kahena," and Kaegi, *Muslim Expansion*, pp. 242–51.

41 *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edn., s.v. "Kuysayla," 2012, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edn., ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs, Leiden: Brill, 2005.

Almohades regime.⁴² The major echo of Christian North African history in the early career of its Muslim successor was the prevalence of dissident sects. In the case of Maghribi Islam, the major threat to Sunni orthodoxy during this period came not from Shia, followers of an alternative succession to the heritage of the Prophet Muhammad, but rather through sects of the Kharajite (secessionist) movement, which rejected any line of hereditary (and necessarily Arab) caliphs or imams.

North Africa along with Spain was originally conquered in the name of the Sunni Umayyad Caliphate, based in Damascus, with authority over both regions delegated to governors based in Qayrawan. In the course of the eighth century, this structure came apart because of local Berber rebellions and instability at the center of the Caliphate, which shifted in 750 to Baghdad under a new (and initially less clearly orthodox) dynasty, the Abbasids. The first definitive break came in 750 when the Spanish Umayyads refused to recognize the Abbasids and formed their own caliphate based in Cordoba. The Maghrib experienced more prolonged and vacillating efforts to assert caliphal rule, although, by the end of the century, it had broken into separate Muslim states that, except for a brief Almohades effort at reunification, characterizes the region's political geography up to the present. The religious inspiration for Berber rebellions against representatives of the Caliph and the basis of at least two of the regional successor states was Kharajism.⁴³

This dissident movement originated at the centers of the early Islamic world in western Arabia and Iraq but achieved political power only in peripheral areas such as North Africa, where emissaries of this sect are said to have arrived around 719. The first political manifestation of Maghribi Kharajism occurred between 739 and 742 when a massive Berber revolt broke out, first in the north of Morocco but subsequently as a threat to the Arab governing base of Qayrawan. A second such outbreak in the latter 750s, when the Abbasids were still consolidating their authority, represents the peak of Kharajite power, in which the dissidents occupied both Qayrawan and coastal Tripoli. In 762 caliphal forces regained control over the territories

42 Mohamed Talbi, "Le Christianisme maghrébin: de la conquête musulmane à sa disparition," in Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi (eds.), *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth To Eighteenth Centuries* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), pp. 313–51, and Mark A. Handley, "Disputing the End of African Christianity," in Merrill, *Vandals, Romans and Berbers*, pp. 291–310. On North African Judaism, see below.

43 For a chronology of the complex events which follow, see Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 37–59; for more detail on their Kharajite religious base, Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, pp. 49–61.

as far west as central Algeria. The Arab family that came to dominate the governorship here, the Aghlabids, remained nominally loyal to the Abbasids but by 800 had been recognized as hereditary rulers of what amounted to an autonomous state that lasted until 909. In northern Morocco another Arab dynasty, the Idrissids, claiming descent from the Prophet Muhammad via his nephew Ali, took independent power in 788 and survived until 959. But the interior of western Algeria and the south of Morocco came under the rule of two Kharajite regimes that also pioneered trans-Saharan trade.

The largest of these states, the Rustamid imamate (778–909), based at Tahert in western Algeria, belonged to the Ibadiyya, a moderate version of Kharajism that managed to coexist peacefully with Sunni Muslims both in Iraq and, once the Abbasids had retaken Qayrawan, in North Africa. The Rustamids violated Kharajite doctrine by granting leadership to the descendants of their founder, Abd al-Rahman ibn Rustam, a scholar of Persian merchant origin whose initial status derived from his training at the center of Ibadi learning in Basra, Iraq. At the base of Tahert state was a confederation of Berber tribes and “the resulting Ibadi-Berber fusion incorporated all the elements necessary for a long-distance trade network.”⁴⁴

The other Kharajite state of this era, built around Sijilmasa in Morocco (757–977), was located immediately on the northern desert edge and adhered to the Sufri sect. Because the Sufris did not, like the Ibadis, produce many surviving writings of their own, we know them only from descriptions by others. They played a major role in the first wave (739–61) of Berber-Kharajite rebellions in North Africa and continued to sponsor uprisings against the Idrissid regime in Morocco. However, even if less “moderate” than the Ibadis, the rulers of Sijilmasa (eventually ruled by their own hereditary Midrari dynasty) appear to have retained peaceful relations with neighboring North African states, an attitude that may be attributed in both Kharajite cases to their increasing role in trans-Saharan trade.

In later and better-documented periods, the western Sahara trade routes passing through the region around Sijilmasa specialized in gold, a logical consequence of its greater proximity to the sources of this precious metal in the Sudan. There is some evidence suggesting gold trade in this region even before the Sufris settled here.⁴⁵ It is very likely that the Banu Midrar Sufris

44 Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, p. 80.

45 On the c. 734 raid into the Sus, see note 22 above. Al-Bakri, writing in the late tenth century but possibly citing a source some decades earlier, attributes the digging of wells on a route south of Sijilmasa to a figure of the 740s; see Hopkins and Levzion, *Corpus of*

initiated or at least significantly expanded this commerce which was clearly under way via Sijilmasa by the early ninth century, but we have no detailed records about such commerce before this time.⁴⁶

Again, as in Roman times, there is more information about early Muslim Saharan trade in slaves than in gold. The excessive demands for Berber slaves and even treatment of Islamic troops as if they were private property lay behind the Kharajite rebellions of the mid-eighth century and were even recognized as illegitimate by the first Abbasid governor of the Maghrib, since the Berbers were now Muslim. Farther south in the Sahara, particularly around the still relatively populated Fazzan, lay two new potential sources of slaves: still unconverted Berbers and the much more numerous peoples of the Sudan.

A phrase attributed to the second Imam of Tahert, Abd al-Wahab (784–823), claims that the success of his Ibadi religion was based upon “the Nafusa sword” and “Mazata wealth.” The Nafusa, a Berber community from the highlands of the northern Libyan coastal region, provided the Rustamid state with its critical military and administrative support. But the key to trans-Saharan trade was the adherence to Ibadism of the Mazata, herders of donkeys, goats, and camels from Waddan, close to the desert edge. In yet another paradox, the Mazata, who were heirs to the conflicts between Berber tribes and the Garamantes, reinvented and expanded that regime’s cross-desert trade. Around the same time as Rustamids established their capital at Tahert, the Mazata took over Jarma, the capital of a now completely collapsed Garamantian regime, and then established a new trading entrepôt farther south in the Fazzan at Zawila. From here they extended their commercial network to the farthest extent of Uqba’s earlier expedition, Kawar in the eastern Sahara, and by at least the early ninth century were in regular contact with the Saharan-Sudanic kingdom of Kanem. This region of the Sudan produced no gold, so the principal commodity passing northward through its Ibadi commercial system was again slaves.

Early Arabic Sources, pp. 62 and 66; for more such indications of early commercial activity, see Tadeusz Lewicki, “Les origines de l’Islam dans les tribus berbères du Sahara occidental: Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr et ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn al-Ḥabḥāb,” *Studia Islamica*, 32 (1970): 203–14; evidence from Tadmekka (Nixon et al., “New Light,” and Nixon, “Excavating Essouk-Tadmakka”) points to a more eastern gold route.

⁴⁶ The oldest references to gold trade as such are in al-Masudi (written 947–956), citing an earlier author, al-Fazari (c. 820); see Hopkins and Levzion, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources*, pp. 30 and 32; the Midraris are also the oldest North African dynasty to produce coinage based on Sudanic gold, although when exactly this occurred is not clear (Gondonneau and Guerra, “The Circulation of Precious Metals,” 587).

Postscript: forming the classic trans-Saharan world

Sometime near the end of the tenth century, a prominent Muslim scholar of Qayrawan, Ibn Abi Zayd (922–996), produced a canonical catechism of the dominant Maliki school of Sunni law in which he stated: “Trade to the territory of the enemy and to the *Bilad-as-Sudan* is reprehensible. The Prophet said: ‘the journey is a part of the punishment.’”⁴⁷ This pronouncement indicates that at the date the present volume is supposed to terminate, 900 CE, the existing trading links across the Sahara were still far from uniting the two sides of the desert into a common culture. For Ibn Abi Zayd’s judgment to be altered, it was necessary that an orthodox version of Islam prevail across the entire Maghrib and Sahara as well as extending at least to the rulers in the Sudan and also that caravan traffic across the desert become secure enough so that it could engage resources from all over North Africa. These conditions would not be met until the end of the following century.

The initiation and early domination of trans-Saharan trade by Kharajites was both a symptom and a cause of its bad reputation among orthodox Muslims. We can assume that the retreat of both Sufris and Ibadis from efforts to control Qayrawan and Tripoli left them with few options for prosperity other than to exploit their links to desert Berbers. For Ibadis there was also a doctrine of *kitman* (concealment), developed when they had to live under hostile Muslim authorities in Iraq that presumably allowed them to accept the rule of “enemy,” that is, pagan kings in the Sudan, while also justifying the purchase of such *kaffirun* (non-believers) as slaves.⁴⁸

The shift toward a Sunni trans-Saharan regime came in stages. The first, again paradoxically, was the rise, in eastern Algeria during the early 900s, of the Shia Fatimid movement. The Fatimids both destroyed the Rustamid state of Tahert in 909 and a year later took over Tunisia from the Aghlabids. The Ibadis fled from their northern base of political power but became even more committed to controlling trans-Saharan trade by shifting their center of learning and commerce to Wargla, on the desert edge, a site that gave them access to Western Sudanic gold sources via Tadmekka, as well as

47 Ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawānī, *La risāla: ou, Épitre sur les éléments du dogme et de la loi de l’Islām selon le rite mālikite*, trans. Léon Bercher (Algiers: J. Carbonel, 1945), pp. 317–18; see also Michael Brett, “Islam and Trade in the Bilad Al-Sudan, Tenth–Eleventh Century A.D.,” *Journal of African History* 24 (1983): 7–8 and 433.

48 Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, p. 21. Ibadi dynasties also remained in control of the Fazzan and especially Zawila

Fazzan routes to the slaves of the Central Sudan.⁴⁹ The major centers of the Fazzan also remained under Ibadi rule until the end of the twelfth century.⁵⁰ However, in Tunisia the efforts to promote Shiism by the Fatimids and the governing dynasty they left behind when departing for Egypt in 972, the Zirids, only provoked stronger commitments to Maliki Sunnism by Qayrawan scholars such as Ibn Abi Zayd. By about 1140 the Zirids formally broke with Fatimid Egypt and its doctrines, thus ending the most extended episode of Shiism in North Africa.

Maliki orthodoxy only penetrated the western Sahara and Morocco in the mid-eleventh century with the rise of the Almoravids (Arabic: *al-Murabitun*) among the Sanhaja Berbers in the desert portions of this region. The founder of the movement, Abdullah ibn Yasin, was himself a Maliki scholar sent into the desert by Qayrawan authorities at the request of local leaders. Politically, the Almoravid empire (1073–1146) represents a sensational but short-lived conquest of Morocco, Spain, and even a portion of the Sudan by Saharan Berbers. In religious and cultural terms, Almoravid influence was more enduring since they appear to have destroyed the remnants of Ibadism, Shiism, and other more local Islamic sects in at least the western half of the trans-Saharan world.⁵¹

There can be little doubt that the Almoravids were driven by religious fervor, but their political emergence also owed something to competition over western Sahara trading entrepôts between Sanhaja Berbers and newly developing Sudanic states, particularly the Soninke Ghana empire. The eleventh-century geographer al-Bakri describes the capital of Ghana, in terms consistent with Ibn Abi Zayd's vision, as divided into two towns, one "inhabited by Muslims" (i.e. Maghribi merchants) and the other "king's town," whose "religion is paganism and the worship of idols." Yet al-Bakri also notes that the rulers of two lesser Western Sudan kingdoms of this era, Takrur and Gao on the middle Niger, had already converted to Islam.⁵² By the latter eleventh century, Ghana also became Muslim, possibly under the influence of the Almoravids, and may even have joined the latter in

49 Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, pp. 137–38, 144, and 155–56; the three Ibadi eleventh- and twelfth-century texts cited in Levzion and Hopkins, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources*, pp. 88–91, all deal with trade to the Western Sudan.

50 Tadeusz Lewicki, "La répartition géographique des groupements ibadites dans l'Afrique du Nord au moyen-âge," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 21 (1957), 339–43.

51 Nehemia Levzion, 'Abd Allah ibn Yasin and the Almoravids', in John Ralph Willis (ed.), *The Cultivators of Islam* (London: F. Cass, 1979), pp. 78–112.

52 Hopkins and Levzion, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources*, pp. 77, 79–80, and 87.

campaigns for “the eradication of early Ibadi influences from the southern Sudan and the western Sahara.”⁵³

Almoravid orthodoxy also threatened another group that played a part in early trans-Saharan trade, the Jews of North Africa. Like Kharajites, Jews were left to carry on a whole range of occupations seen as inappropriate for good Muslims, although, unlike Christians, they welcomed the shift from the rule of the Byzantines (who persecuted them) to that of the Arabs.⁵⁴ Kharajite communities in Tahert, and at such desert-edge settlements as Wargla and Sijilmasa, proved hospitable to Jewish artisans and merchants who provided valuable metalworking skills as well as commercial links with their brethren in both the east (Tunisia and Egypt) and the northwest (Spain).⁵⁵ The rise of the Almohades in the twelfth century dealt more serious blows to Jewish religious practice and commerce than had the Almoravids, but again, unlike Christians, Jewish communities recovered from this setback and played an even greater (and better-documented) role in later trans-Saharan commerce.⁵⁶

In the Central Sudan the Kanuri Kanem empire was founded, with a base in the southern desert, by sometime in the ninth century and became a major slave-trading partner of Ibadi merchants in the Fazzan.⁵⁷ The Kanem rulers converted to Islam, in its Sunni orthodox form, by at least the eleventh century, and not long after this began to undertake pilgrimages to Mecca.⁵⁸

Pilgrimages from the Sudan, which always passed through North Africa, doubly confirmed the establishment of an integrated trans-Saharan world.

53 Nehemia Levtzion, *Ancient Ghana and Mali* (London: Methuen, 1973), p. 45.

54 Kaegi, *Muslim Expansion*, pp. 84–6 and 293, and H. Z. Hirschberg, *A History of the Jews in North Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), vol. 1, pp. 56–59.

55 Pessah Shinar, “La symbiose judéo-ibadite en Afrique du Nord,” in Michel Abitbol (ed.), *Communautés juives des marges sahariennes du Maghreb* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi et l’Université hébraïque de Jérusalem, 1982), pp. 86–88, and Hmida Toukabri, *Les juifs dans la Tunisie médiévale, 909–1057: D’après les documents de la Geniza du Caire* (Paris: Romillat, 2002), pp. 54–72.

56 Hirschberg, *A History of the Jews in North Africa*, pp. 117–29; Ralph A. Austen, *Trans-Saharan Africa in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 99–100; and Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Western Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 65–70.

57 Vikør, *The Oasis Of Salt*, pp. 173–77. Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, p. 83, provides references to ninth-century relations between the Ibadi state of Tahert and what appears to be a Kanem kingdom in the Sudan.

58 The chronicles of what became the Kanem-Borno dynasty, written down only in the thirteenth century, describe pilgrimages as early as 1075, but the first such voyage confirmed by outside sources did not take place until late in the thirteenth century; see Dierk Lange, *Le diwān des sultans du (Kānem-)Bornū: chronologie et histoire d’un royaume africain (de la fin du Xe siècle jusqu’à 1808)* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1977), pp. 69 and 73.

Not only did they act out one of the major pillars of the newly shared religion, but they also demonstrated that a secure system of movement across the desert was now in place. The technology of camel transport did not change much in the ensuing centuries, although caravans – formed by the seasonal joining together of various merchants around a single paid guide and his staff – grew considerably in size. The influence of Islam in both the Sahara and the Sudan also increased in width as well as depth, eventually impacting on the management and adjudication of caravan trade.⁵⁹ However, the basis for all these developments was laid out by the environmental, social, political, and religious struggles in this portion of Africa during the Neolithic, ancient, and early Islamic eras.

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59 On caravan economies and organization, see Ralph A. Austen. See also Dennis D. Cordell, "Trade, Transportation and Expanding Economic Networks: Saharan Caravan Commerce in the Era of European Expansion, 1500–1900," in Toyin Falola and Alusine Jalloh (eds.), *Black Business and Economic Power* (University of Rochester Press, 2002), pp. 80–113, and Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails*, pp. 206–386.

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